

October 2009

FIRE GRANTS

FEMA Has Met Most Requirements for Awarding Fire Grants, but Additional Actions Would Improve Its Grant Process



GAO

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Highlights of [GAO-10-64](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

The Department of Homeland Security, through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), awards grants to fire departments and other organizations for equipment, staffing, and other needs. As of July 2009, FEMA had received about 25,000 and 22,000 applications for its fiscal years 2007 and 2008 fire grant programs, respectively, and had awarded more than 5,000 grants in both years. GAO was congressionally directed to review the application and award process for these grants. This report addresses the (1) extent to which FEMA has met statutory and program requirements for distributing the grant funds; (2) actions FEMA has taken to provide assistance to grant applicants and involve the fire service community in the grant process; and (3) extent to which FEMA has ensured that its grant process is accessible, clear, and consistent with requirements, including its grant guidance. GAO analyzed relevant laws and interviewed 36 randomly selected grant applicants to obtain their views, but the results are not generalizable.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that FEMA, among other things, establish a procedure to track Emergency Medical Service (EMS) awards, ensure that grant priorities are aligned with application questions and scoring values, and provide specific feedback to rejected applicants. DHS agreed with GAO's recommendations.

View [GAO-10-64](#) or [key components](#).
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FEMA Has Met Most Requirements for Awarding Fire Grants, but Additional Actions Would Improve Its Grant Process

What GAO Found

FEMA met seven of eight statutory requirements and two of three FEMA established program requirements for distributing fiscal years 2007 and 2008 grant funds. (GAO used fiscal year 2007 data for two requirements because not all fiscal year 2008 funds had been awarded by July 2009.) For example, FEMA met the statutory requirement that volunteer and combination fire departments (which have both paid and volunteer firefighters) collectively receive at least a minimum of 55 percent of fiscal year 2008 grant funds, and also met the program requirement that volunteer departments receive at least 22 percent. GAO was unable to determine whether FEMA met the statutory requirement that at least 3.5 percent of fiscal year 2008 grant funds be awarded for EMS. FEMA reported that its system is not designed to separately track grants awarded to fire departments for EMS purposes and, therefore, it could not determine if it met this requirement. FEMA reported that while it conducted research to determine that it met this requirement for 1 year, doing so was laborious. Establishing procedures to track awards for EMS purposes would allow FEMA to readily determine if it met statutory requirements.

FEMA assists grant applicants by sponsoring workshops and involves representatives of the fire service community in establishing criteria and reviewing applications. Each year, FEMA convenes leaders of nine major fire service organizations to conduct a criteria development meeting to develop the program's criteria and funding priorities. FEMA's peer review process—which members of the fire service organizations assess grant applications—also helps ensure that the fire service community is involved in the grant process. FEMA officials stated that they strive to provide an even chance for as many fire departments and other organizations as possible to serve on peer review panels. They also stated that they are considering conducting outreach efforts to expand peer review participation, such as announcing opportunities to serve on an upcoming peer review panel at workshops.

FEMA has taken actions to ensure that its fire grants award process is accessible and clear to grant applicants—28 of 36 applicants GAO interviewed found the guidance to be clear—but GAO also identified inconsistencies between the stated grant application priorities and the application questions and scoring values. For example, the fiscal year 2008 guidance for the grant that funds the recruitment and retention of firefighters states that continuity—maintaining recruitment and retention efforts beyond the life of the grant—was a priority for grant awards. However, no grant application question addressed this priority and the scoring values did not include it. Thus, it is difficult for FEMA to ensure that grant funds are awarded in accordance with the agency's funding priorities. Further, four of the nine major fire service organizations voiced concerns about feedback FEMA provided to rejected applicants, and 22 of the 36 applicants stated that the feedback was helpful to little or no extent. FEMA officials stated that they could strengthen efforts to improve feedback. Providing specific feedback to rejected applicants could help FEMA strengthen future grant application processes.

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Abbreviations

AFG	Assistance to Firefighters Grant
CFSI	Congressional Fire Services Institute
DHS	Department of Homeland Security
EMS	emergency medical services
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
FP&S	Fire Prevention and Safety
GPD	Grant Programs Directorate
IAAI	International Association of Arson Investigators
IAFC	International Association of Fire Chiefs
IAFF	International Association of Fire Fighters
ISFSI	International Society of Fire Services Instructors
MOU	memorandum of understanding
NAFTD	North American Fire Training Directors
NASFM	National Association of State Fire Marshals
NFPA	National Fire Protection Association
NVFC	National Volunteer Fire Council
OMB	Office of Management and Budget
R&D	research and development
R&R	recruitment and retention
SAFER	Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response
USFA	United States Fire Administration

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United States Government Accountability Office
Washington, DC 20548

October 30, 2009

The Honorable Robert C. Byrd
Chairman
The Honorable George Voinovich
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Homeland Security
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate

The Honorable David E. Price
Chairman
The Honorable Harold Rogers
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Homeland Security
Committee on Appropriations
House of Representatives

In recent decades, the U.S. fire service community has experienced changes in the responsibilities of firefighters and in local budget allocations for fire departments. While firefighting has traditionally been the responsibility of states and local communities, the Congressional Research Service and others have reported¹ that an increase in emergency medical services (EMS) provided by firefighters combined with state and local budget shortfalls in the 1990s led the fire service community to request financial assistance from the federal government in areas such as equipment, training, and hiring and recruiting and retaining firefighters. Consequently, the Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) program is in its ninth year, with appropriations totaling over \$4.8 billion since 2001. According to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA),² in 2007 an estimated 1.1 million firefighters from more than 30,000 fire departments protected communities in the United States; of these firefighters, 72

¹ See also National Academy of Public Administration, *Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program: Assessing Performance* (Washington, D.C., April 2007), National Fire Protection Association, "The United States Fire Service," (2007), <http://www.nfpa.org/assets/files/PDF/Research/FireServiceFactSheet.pdf> (accessed Oct. 8, 2009).

² NFPA is an international nonprofit membership association that develops and publishes consensus codes and standards and offers statistical and data services through its Fire Analysis and Research Division.

percent were volunteers. In 2006, an NFPA assessment of the United States fire service stated that it is likely that in communities with a population of less than 2,500, 21 percent of fire departments would most often fail to deliver the national standard of at least four firefighters to respond to fire calls. In addition, the assessment recorded that an estimated 60 percent of fire departments did not have enough self-contained breathing apparatuses to equip all firefighters on a shift, and 49 percent of all fire engines were at least 15 years old, which is indicative of a potential need for replacements. Fire departments are also increasingly responsible for responding to calls unrelated to fire, such as medical emergencies. NFPA found that medical aid responses tripled from 1980 to 2007, with 6 percent of calls to fire departments in 2007 due to actual fires.

Within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Grant Programs Directorate's (GPD) AFG Program Office, in consultation with the U.S. Fire Administration (USFA), administers the AFG program and two other competitive fire grant programs designed to provide assistance to firefighters—the Fire Prevention and Safety (FP&S) grant program and the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) grant program. The purpose of the AFG program is to promote the health and safety of the public and firefighting personnel against fire and fire-related hazards. Funding is available for a variety of activities, such as certifying fire inspectors, acquiring firefighting or personal protective equipment, modifying firefighter facilities, acquiring firefighting vehicles, and funding EMS. The FP&S program, which is funded through the appropriation for the AFG program, is intended to support both fire prevention and safety activities and firefighter safety research and development (R&D) activities. The purpose of the SAFER program, which includes grants for hiring career firefighters and recruiting and retaining volunteer firefighters, is to increase the number of firefighters to help communities meet industry minimum standards and attain 24-hour staffing.

This report responds to the accompanying explanatory statement to the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2008,³ which mandates that we review the application and award process for AFG and SAFER grants. Although FEMA implements the AFG and FP&S grant programs separately, the two

³ Pub. L. No. 110-161, 121 Stat. 1844 (2007). The statute's explanatory statement was published in the December 17, 2007, daily edition of the Congressional Record, and the congressional direction for this GAO study appears on page H16096.

programs are authorized by the same legislation. Consequently, we also examined the FP&S grant program in this report. We did not assess the results achieved by those applicants receiving grants, as this was beyond the scope of our review. Accordingly, this report addresses the following questions:

- (1) To what extent has FEMA met statutory and program requirements for distributing the grant funds to a variety of applicants and activities?
- (2) What actions has FEMA taken to provide assistance to grant applicants and involve the fire service community in the grant process?
- (3) To what extent has FEMA taken actions to help ensure the fire grant process and related guidance are accessible, clear, and consistent with applicable statutory and program requirements?

To address the first question, we identified relevant statutory requirements from sections 33 and 34 of the Federal Fire Prevention and Control Act of 1974 (called the Fire Act and the SAFER Act, respectively, for purposes of this report). We also identified relevant program requirements established in FEMA's grant guidance for the AFG, SAFER, and FP&S grant programs, which related to distributing grant funds among different categories of activities and applicants.⁴ We then compared these statutory and program requirements to FEMA grant award data that stratified awards based on the type of fire department—volunteer, career, or combination⁵—and based on the type of activity, such as awards for vehicle acquisitions. We reviewed FEMA data from fiscal year 2002, which was when FEMA began

⁴ Federal Emergency Management Agency, *Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program and Application Guidance* (Washington, D.C., February 2008); Federal Emergency Management Agency, *Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program 2008 Fire Prevention and Safety Grants* (Washington, D.C., February 2009); and Department of Homeland Security, *Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response Program and Application Guidance* (Washington, D.C., May 2008).

⁵ FEMA defines a volunteer fire department as one in which no members receive any compensation other than a length of service retirement program and insurance, whereas a career department is one in which all members are compensated for their services. A combination department is defined as having any number of both volunteer and career firefighters regardless of their proportion to one another. According to a FEMA program specialist responsible for administering the AFG and SAFER grant programs, combination departments also include paid on call/stipend departments. If a volunteer fire department provides stipends to its members or provides "pay-on-call" for its members, the department is considered to be combination.

maintaining electronic fire grant award data.⁶ At the time of our review, FEMA's fire grant award data were current as of July 2009, at which time the agency was in the process of awarding fiscal year 2007 FP&S grants and fiscal year 2008 AFG and SAFER grants. These years were the latest for which grants had been awarded at the time of our review and for which we were able to determine FEMA's compliance with statutory and program funding distribution requirements. We analyzed FEMA's annual listings of applications and awards for the AFG and FP&S grant programs from fiscal years 2002 through 2008 and SAFER grant program from fiscal years 2005⁷ through 2008 to provide descriptive information on a number of other characteristics, such as the type of community served by the applicant—urban, suburban, or rural. We also determined the number of times that departments have applied for and been awarded grants. To assess the reliability of data provided by FEMA, we reviewed and discussed the sources of data with agency officials. We determined that the data were sufficiently reliable for the purposes of this report.

To address the second question, we collected and reviewed pertinent FEMA documents, such as program guidance, as well as observed FEMA's fiscal year 2010 criteria development panel process and the fiscal year 2008 FP&S peer review panel process. We analyzed the procedures that FEMA uses to inform applicants about the fire grant programs, including the various forms of outreach and the types of assistance that FEMA provides to applicants. We obtained and reviewed information pertaining to the selection procedures for peer reviewers, who are to independently evaluate applications according to established criteria, and analyzed the training that they receive. We conducted structured interviews with a nonprobability sample of 36 randomly selected grant applicants that applied for fiscal year 2008 funding from the AFG and SAFER grant programs or fiscal year 2007 funding from the FP&S grant program. Although the results of the interviews are not generalizable, they provided insights on the perspective of grant applicants. We also conducted

⁶ Although the first appropriation for the AFG grant program was made in fiscal year 2001, a program specialist responsible for administering the AFG and SAFER grant programs informed us that electronic data were not available until fiscal year 2002.

⁷ The first appropriation for the SAFER grant program was made in fiscal year 2005.

interviews with officials of FEMA, USFA, and nine fire service organizations.⁸

To address the third question, we reviewed FEMA's methods of making its grant guidance and the application accessible to potential applicants. We also identified statutory requirements pertaining to fire grant applications and analyzed FEMA's fiscal year 2008 grant guidance and application forms to determine whether they consistently instructed applicants to submit statutorily required information. In addition, we compared the grant guidance to the application questions and scoring matrix to determine the extent to which they were consistent. To determine whether FEMA's process for issuing grant guidance had adequate controls, we obtained and analyzed information regarding approval and issuance of fiscal years 2007 and 2008 program and application guidance. We compared the agency's process for documenting and monitoring the program guidance approval process with criteria in *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*.⁹ We conducted interviews with officials from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), DHS, and FEMA to obtain information about the approval and issuance of the program and application guidance as well as how grant decisions are announced. We analyzed the type of feedback provided to unsuccessful grant applicants and determined the circumstances under which they may appeal FEMA's grant decisions. During our structured interviews with a nonprobability sample of 36 randomly selected fire grant applicants, we obtained their views regarding feedback that FEMA provided. To assess the reliability of data provided by DHS and FEMA on the fire grant applicants, review criteria, and award procedures, we reviewed and

⁸ In its grant guidance, FEMA identified the following nine major fire service organizations: the Congressional Fire Service Institute, the International Association of Arson Investigators, the International Association of Fire Chiefs, the International Association of Firefighters, the International Society of Fire Service Instructors, the North American Fire Training Directors, the National Association of State Fire Marshals, the National Fire Protection Association, and the National Volunteer Fire Council.

⁹ GAO, *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, [GAO/AIMD-00-21.3.1](#) (Washington, D.C.: November 1999). These standards, issued pursuant to the requirements of the Federal Managers' Financial Integrity Act of 1982, provide the overall framework for establishing and maintaining internal control in the federal government. Also pursuant to the act, the Office of Management and Budget issued Circular A-123, revised December 21, 2004, to provide the specific requirements for assessing the reporting on internal controls. Internal control standards and the definition of internal control in Circular A-123 are based on GAO's *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*.

discussed the sources of data with agency officials. We determined that the data were sufficiently reliable for the purposes of this report.

We conducted this performance audit from January 2009 through October 2009 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. Additional details on our scope and methodology are contained in appendix I.

Background

Statutory and Program Requirements of the Fire Grant Programs

FEMA's fire grant programs are available to a variety of fire departments—those composed of volunteer firefighters, career firefighters, or a combination thereof. In the case of the AFG program, grants also extend to nonaffiliated EMS organizations.¹⁰ In the case of the FP&S program, grants also extend to local, state, national, or community organizations that are not fire departments, such as research universities and fire service organizations. The statutes authorizing FEMA's fire grant programs specify how funds are to be distributed among certain eligible applicants and activities.

Authority for the AFG and FP&S programs derives from section 33 of the Federal Fire Prevention and Control Act of 1974 (Fire Act).¹¹ The Fire Act requires FEMA to convene an annual meeting of individuals who are members of national fire service organizations for the purpose of recommending criteria for awarding grants for the next fiscal year.¹² The act also requires FEMA, in consultation with national fire service organizations, to appoint fire service personnel to conduct a peer review of the grant applications, the results of which FEMA is to consider in

¹⁰ Nonaffiliated EMS organizations are defined as public or private nonprofit EMS organizations that are not affiliated with a hospital and do not serve a geographic area with adequate EMS services already provided by a fire department. 15 U.S.C. § 2229(d)(2).

¹¹ This report shall refer to section 33 of the Federal Fire Prevention and Control Act of 1974 as the Fire Act, which is codified, as amended, at 15 U.S.C. § 2229.

¹² 15 U.S.C. § 2229(b)(13).

awarding the grants.¹³ The Fire Act also contains specific grant application requirements. In particular, AFG and FP&S grant applicants are statutorily required to provide information demonstrating financial need; an analysis of costs and benefits resulting from the assistance; a list of other sources of federal funding received by the applicant to avoid duplicative funding; and an agreement by the applicant to provide information during the grant period to the National Fire Incident Reporting System, which represents the world's largest national, annual database of fire incident information.¹⁴ AFG grant applicants are subject to an additional evaluation requirement—the extent to which the grant would enhance the applicant's daily operations and the grant's impact on the protection of lives and property.¹⁵

Section 34 of the Federal Fire Prevention and Control Act of 1974 (SAFER Act) provides the authority for the third fire grant program administered by FEMA.¹⁶ There are two types of SAFER grants: hiring grants, which are open to career, volunteer, and combination fire departments, and recruitment and retention grants, which are open to volunteer and combination fire departments, or to state or local organizations that represent the interests of volunteer firefighters.¹⁷ Hiring grants are subject to specific cost-sharing requirements between the federal government and the grantee, with the federal share decreasing over the 4-year grant period.¹⁸ Furthermore, the grantee is required to commit to retaining any firefighter hired through grant funds for at least 1 year after federal

¹³ 15 U.S.C. § 2229(b)(15).

¹⁴ 15 U.S.C. § 2229(b)(5).

¹⁵ 15 U.S.C. § 2229(b)(14)(B).

¹⁶ This report shall refer to section 34 of the Federal Fire Prevention and Control Act of 1974 as the SAFER Act, which was enacted on November 24, 2003 and is set forth at 15 U.S.C. § 2229a.

¹⁷ 15 U.S.C. § 2229a(a)(1)-(2). According to the Director of Government Affairs for the International Society of Fire Service Instructors, volunteer fire departments use the hiring grants to start the transition process to becoming career departments, but typically retain their volunteer status until over 50 percent of their personnel are full-time employees.

¹⁸ 15 U.S.C. § 2229a(a)(1)(E). The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, Pub. L. No. 111-5, Div. A., Title VI, § 603, 123 Stat. 115, 165 (2009), waived the SAFER Act's local cost-sharing requirement for grant funds appropriated in fiscal years 2009 or 2010.

funding ends, amounting to a 5-year service commitment.¹⁹ The statutory cost-share and service commitment requirements applicable to SAFER hiring grants do not apply to SAFER recruitment and retention grants.²⁰

SAFER grants, like AFG and FP&S grants, are awarded on a competitive basis through a peer review process.²¹ The SAFER Act is also similar to the Fire Act in requiring grant applications to include certain types of information. In addition to any information FEMA may require applicants to submit, the statute requires applicants to provide assurances regarding diversity in hiring; to explain their inability to address the need without federal assistance; and to specify long-term retention plans after federal funding ends, including, for hiring grants, how the applicant plans to meet the statute's 5-year service commitment.²² A hiring grant applicant is also required to discuss what it will do to ensure that its department does not discriminate against firefighters who engage in volunteer activities in another jurisdiction during off-duty hours.²³ The SAFER Act has a statutory sunset of 10 years from the date of enactment, such that the agency's authority to make SAFER grants will elapse on November 24, 2013.²⁴ (See app. II for a table that sets forth the statutory requirements applicable to the AFG, FP&S, and SAFER grant programs).

Each appropriations act enacted after January 2002 has made fire grant appropriations available for 2 fiscal years, after which any unobligated funds expire. The Consolidated Security, Disaster Assistance, and

¹⁹ 15 U.S.C. § 2229a(a)(1)(B)(ii). The Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2009, Pub. L. No. 111-32, 123 Stat. 1859, 1882 (2009), authorized the Secretary of Homeland Security to grant waivers from various SAFER Act requirements in awarding grants during fiscal years 2009 or 2010, including the requirement for a 4-year grant term followed by a 1-year unfunded service commitment.

²⁰ Following the enactment of legislative changes to the SAFER program applicable to fiscal years 2009 and 2010, the fiscal year 2010 Criteria Development Panel, which met in July 2009, recommended various changes in the program, such as shortening the performance period of the grants. Any changes that result from this panel's recommendations will apply to grant awards made using fiscal year 2010 funds.

²¹ 15 U.S.C. § 2229a(a)(1)(G). The statutory requirement for a competitive peer review process specifically applies to hiring grants, but FEMA uses the same process for recruitment and retention grants.

²² 15 U.S.C. § 2229a(b)(2)-(3).

²³ 15 U.S.C. § 2229a(b)(3)(B).

²⁴ 15 U.S.C. § 2229a(e). Unlike SAFER grants, AFG and FP&S grants do not have a sunset provision.

Continuing Appropriations Act, 2009—which contains the fiscal year 2009 Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Act—provided \$775 million for firefighter assistance, including \$565 million for fire grants and \$210 million for SAFER grants. Table 1 shows the AFG and SAFER appropriations beginning with their first funded years, fiscal year 2001 and fiscal year 2005, respectively. (The FP&S funds are included in the AFG appropriation.)

Table 1: Appropriations for AFG and SAFER, Fiscal Years 2001 through 2009

(Dollars in millions)

Fiscal year	AFG ^a	SAFER ^b
2001	\$100	N/A
2002	360	N/A
2003	745 ^c	N/A
2004	746 ^c	N/A
2005	650	\$65
2006	540 ^c	109 ^c
2007	547	115
2008	560	190
2009	565	210
Total	\$4,813	\$689

Source: Appropriations acts.

Legend: N/A = not applicable.

Note: For fiscal year 2009, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, Pub. L. No. 111-5, 123 Stat. 115, 164 (2009), appropriated an additional \$210 million for the purpose of awarding competitive grants to modify, upgrade, or construct nonfederal fire stations, up to \$15 million per grant.

^aFP&S fire grant funding is included in the AFG column and is required to be at least 5 percent of the AFG appropriation.

^bThe SAFER Act was enacted on November 24, 2003. Although the SAFER Act authorized appropriations for fiscal year 2004, the first appropriation was made in fiscal year 2005.

^cThis is a rounded figure that we calculated by applying an enacted rescission to the appropriation. In fiscal year 2003, a 0.65 percent rescission applied to a \$750 million AFG appropriation. In fiscal year 2004, a 0.59 percent rescission applied to a \$750 million AFG appropriation. In fiscal year 2006, a 1 percent rescission applied to a \$545 million appropriation for AFG and a \$110 million appropriation for SAFER.

Development of Grant Criteria and Funding Priorities

FEMA describes annual funding priorities for the grant programs in its grant guidance document, which incorporates recommendations from the programs' criteria development panel. The criteria development panel is composed of subject matter experts who meet annually for 3 days to review and modify the previous year's funding priorities and award criteria

for all three fire grant programs, and whose recommendations are summarized in a report to FEMA.²⁵ Detailed information about the mission and purpose of each fire service organization is contained in appendix III. The review process for all three grant programs includes three evaluation stages: an automated scoring or prescreening process to determine eligibility and alignment with the grant programs' funding priorities; a peer review panel, in which practitioners within the fire service community evaluate and score the applications; and a final technical review by subject matter specialists, FEMA officials in the AFG Program Office and the Grants Management Division, as well as officials in state homeland security offices, if applicable.

The criteria development panel also updates the previous year's scoring matrix, which is a confidential, weighted numerical scoring methodology that reflects the identified funding priorities.²⁶ The scoring matrix is used to rate AFG and SAFER applications by scoring the answers to the application questions that are weighted to reflect the funding priorities. If applicants request funding for multiple activities, each activity is scored independently of the others. The activities' scores are then weighted based on the dollar amount and combined to determine the application's overall score.

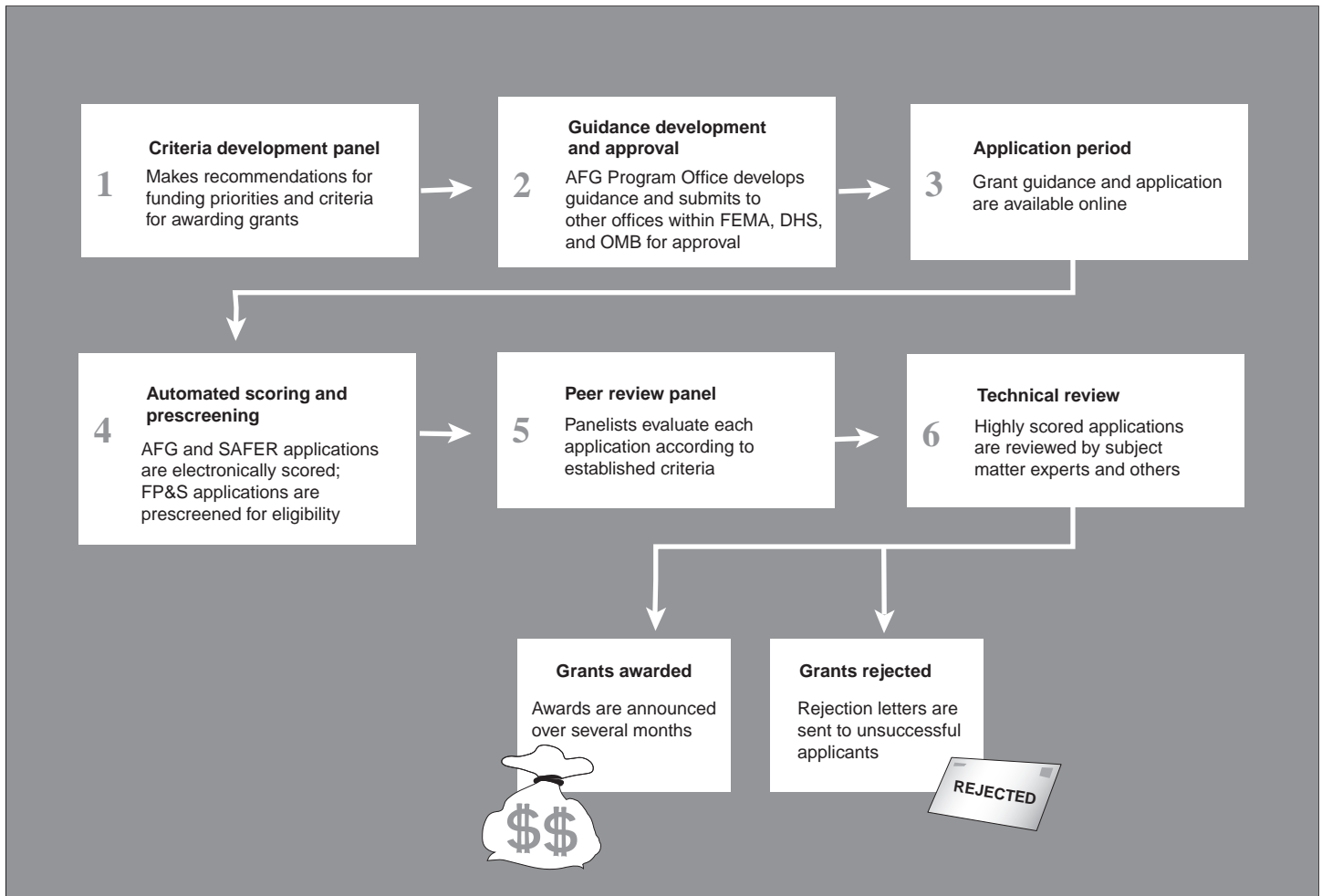
Following review and discussion of the previous year's information, the criteria development panel submits its recommendations on the grant criteria and funding priorities—including those on which participants do not reach consensus—to the AFG Program Office in the form of a report. After incorporating the panel's recommendations and developing the grant guidance for the three grant programs, the AFG Program Office submits the guidance to other offices within FEMA for internal review. Subsequently, it sends the guidance to DHS and OMB for approval. The grant review and award process is represented in figure 1. (See app. IV for

²⁵ FEMA brings together a panel of fire service professionals representing the leadership of the nine major fire service organizations: the International Association of Fire Chiefs, the International Association of Firefighters, the National Volunteer Fire Council, the National Fire Protection Association, the National Association of State Fire Marshals, the International Association of Arson Investigators, the North American Fire Training Directors, the International Society of Fire Service Instructors, and the Congressional Fire Service Institute.

²⁶ Under the FP&S grants program, a scoring matrix is not used to rank applications relative to funding priorities.

more detailed information about each of the steps involved in the application and award process.)

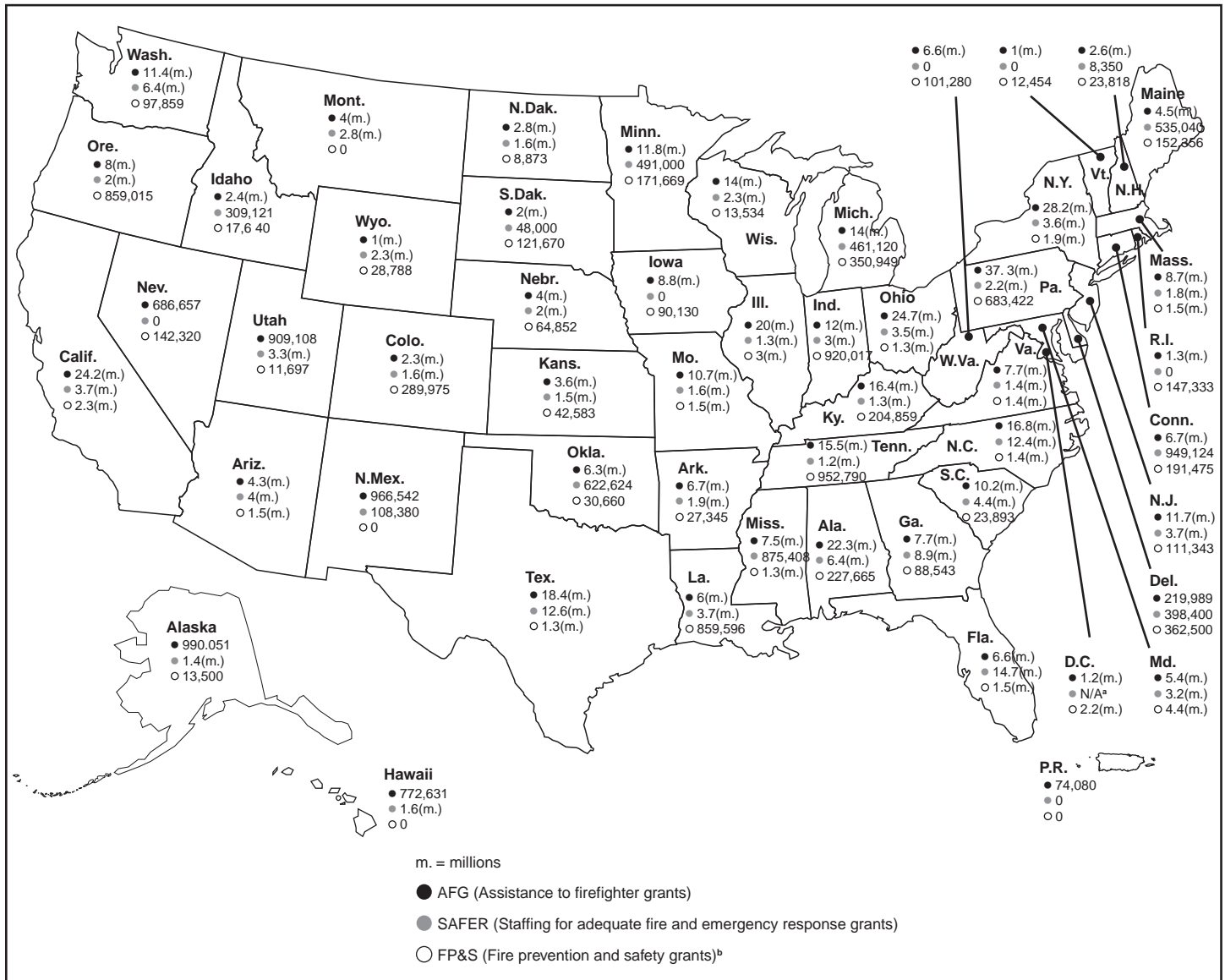
Figure 1: Application and Award Process for Fire Grants



Sources: GAO analysis and ArtExplosion (clip art).

Figure 2 shows the distribution of federal funds for the three fire grant programs by state for fiscal year 2008.

Figure 2: National Distribution of Federal Funds for Fire Grant Programs, Fiscal Year 2008



Sources: GAO analysis of FEMA data and Art Explosion (map).

Notes: Fire grants data for fiscal year 2008 are current as of July 2009. The fiscal year 2008 fire grants period closed on September 30, 2009, the end of fiscal year 2009. State category includes Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia.

^aNo organization from the District of Columbia applied for SAFER grants in fiscal year 2008.

^bFP&S application and award numbers are for fiscal year 2007 and reflect all fiscal year 2007 awards made through July 2009. No fiscal year 2008 FP&S grants had been awarded as of July 2009.

As shown in table 2, grant applicants submitted more than 22,000 applications for the AFG and SAFER grant programs for fiscal year 2008, and as of July 2009, FEMA had awarded a total of 5,060 grants. As of July 2009, applicants submitted about 2,500 applications for the fiscal year 2007 FP&S grants and FEMA had awarded a total of 216 grants.²⁷

Table 2: Total Number of Fire Grant Applications and Awards by Activity

Grant	Activity	Number of applications submitted	Number of grants awarded
AFG (fiscal year 2008)	Operations and safety	12,591	4,007
	Vehicle acquisition	7,910	635
	Regional	521	163
	AFG total	21,022	4,805
SAFER (fiscal year 2008)	Hiring	741	151
	Recruitment and retention	493	92
	Recruitment and retention/hiring ^a	80	12
	SAFER total	1,314	255
FP&S (fiscal year 2007) ^b	Fire prevention	2,506	203
	Research and development	38	10
	Research and prevention ^c	17	3
	FP&S total	2,561	216
All programs total		24,897	5,276

Source: GAO analysis of FEMA data.

Note: Fire grant data for fiscal year 2008 are current as of July 2009. The fiscal year 2008 fire grant period closed on September 30, 2009, which is the end of fiscal year 2009.

^aRecruitment and retention/hiring applications are those of applicants that submitted requests for both activities in a single application.

^bFP&S application and award numbers are for fiscal year 2007 funding and reflect all fiscal year 2007 awards made through July 2009. No fiscal year 2008 FP&S grants had been awarded as of July 2009.

^cResearch and prevention applications are those of applicants that submitted requests for both activities (i.e., R&D and fire prevention) in a single application.

²⁷ FEMA received about 25,000 applications for AFG, SAFER, and FP&S grants in fiscal year 2007 and awarded more than 5,000 grants. See apps. V through X for more detailed information about the distribution of AFG, SAFER, and FP&S program funds.

FEMA Met Most Statutory and Program Requirements for Distributing Grants, but Did Not Fully Track Compliance with One Statutory Requirement and Had Not Fully Met One Program Requirement for Fiscal Year 2007

In awarding fiscal year 2008 AFG and SAFER grants and fiscal year 2007 FP&S grants, FEMA met seven of eight statutory and two of three program requirements. These requirements specified how FEMA was to distribute appropriated grant funds between different applicants and activities. In July 2009, when FEMA provided fire grant award data for our review, the agency was in the process of awarding fiscal year 2007 FP&S grants and fiscal year 2008 AFG and SAFER grants. These years were the latest for which grants had been awarded and for which we were able to determine FEMA's compliance with statutory and program funding distribution requirements.²⁸ In addition, we used fiscal year 2007 data to determine whether FEMA met one statutory and one program requirement not yet satisfied for fiscal year 2008 because grant award data for fiscal year 2008 were not complete at the time of our review. Specifically, we determined that in fiscal year 2007, FEMA met the statutory requirement to award at least 5 percent of the AFG appropriation for FP&S activities, but did not meet the program requirement to award at least 33 percent of the AFG appropriation to combination fire departments. We were unable to determine whether FEMA met statutorily mandated EMS funding levels related to AFG grants because FEMA only captures data for EMS awards to nonaffiliated EMS organizations, not EMS awards to fire departments. Table 3 lists the statutory and program funding distribution requirements that we evaluated and the extent to which FEMA met these requirements.

²⁸ Fire grant data for fiscal years 2007 and 2008 are current as of July 2009.

Table 3: GAO Assessment of Whether FEMA Met Statutory and Program Requirements for Distributing Fire Grant Funds, Fiscal Year 2008

Grant program	Requirement	Source	Status
AFG	Volunteer and combination fire departments are to receive a proportion of the total grant funding that is not less than the proportion of the U.S. population protected by those fire departments, which FEMA estimated at 55 percent. ^a	Statute	Met
	Awards to nonaffiliated EMS organizations shall account for not more than 2 percent of appropriation.	Statute	Met ^b
	Grants to acquire firefighting vehicles are not to exceed 25 percent of appropriation.	Statute	Met ^b
	A total of \$3 million is to be made available for foam firefighting equipment.	Statute	Met
	EMS awards must account for at least 3.5 percent of appropriation.	Statute	Status undetermined; EMS awards not fully tracked
	Career fire departments are to receive a proportion of the total grant funding that is no more than the proportion of the U.S. population they protect, which FEMA estimated at 45 percent. ^c	Program guidance	Met
	Volunteer fire departments are to receive a proportion of the total grant funding that is not less than the proportion of the U.S. population they protect, which FEMA estimated at 22 percent. ^d	Program guidance	Met
	Combination fire departments are to receive a proportion of the total grant funding that is not less than the proportion of the U.S. population they protect, which FEMA estimated at 33 percent. ^d	Program guidance	Not met in fiscal year 2007 Not met for fiscal year 2008, as of July 2009 ^e
FP&S	FP&S grants must account for at least 5 percent of the AFG appropriation.	Statute	Met for fiscal year 2007 Not met for fiscal year 2008, as of July 2009 ^f
SAFER	FEMA is to set aside 10 percent of appropriation for volunteer fire departments (whole or majority) to compete for SAFER hiring grants. FEMA is to transfer any unused funds for the award of SAFER recruitment and retention grants.	Statute	Met
	FEMA is to direct at least 10 percent of appropriation for volunteer and combination fire departments (and state or local organizations representing them) to compete for recruitment and retention grants.	Statute	Met

Source: GAO analysis of FEMA data.

Note: Fire grant data for fiscal year 2008 are current as of July 2009. The fiscal year 2008 fire grant period closed on September 30, 2009, which is the end of fiscal year 2009.

^aAccording to AFG program guidance, NFPA reported that combination departments protect 33 percent of the nation's population and volunteer departments protect 22 percent. We did not verify FEMA's estimates.

^bBecause we do not have complete data for the final quarter of fiscal year 2009, it is possible that FEMA could exceed the statutory cap as a result of fourth quarter awards. However, as of July 2009, FEMA was within the cap.

^cAccording to AFG program guidance, NFPA reported that combination departments protect 33 percent of the nation's population and volunteer departments protect 22 percent, and no more than 45 percent of the grant funds may be awarded to career departments. We did not verify FEMA's estimates.

^dAccording to AFG program guidance, NFPA reported that combination departments protect 33 percent of the nation's population and volunteer departments protect 22 percent. We did not verify FEMA's estimates.

^eBecause we do not have complete data for the final quarter of fiscal year 2009, it is possible that FEMA could satisfy the program minimum as a result of fourth quarter awards. However, FEMA was unable to reach the same program minimum during the fiscal year 2007 AFG grant cycle.

^fNo fiscal year 2008 FP&S grants had been awarded as of July 2009. However, FEMA met the statutory minimum for FP&S awards in fiscal year 2007.

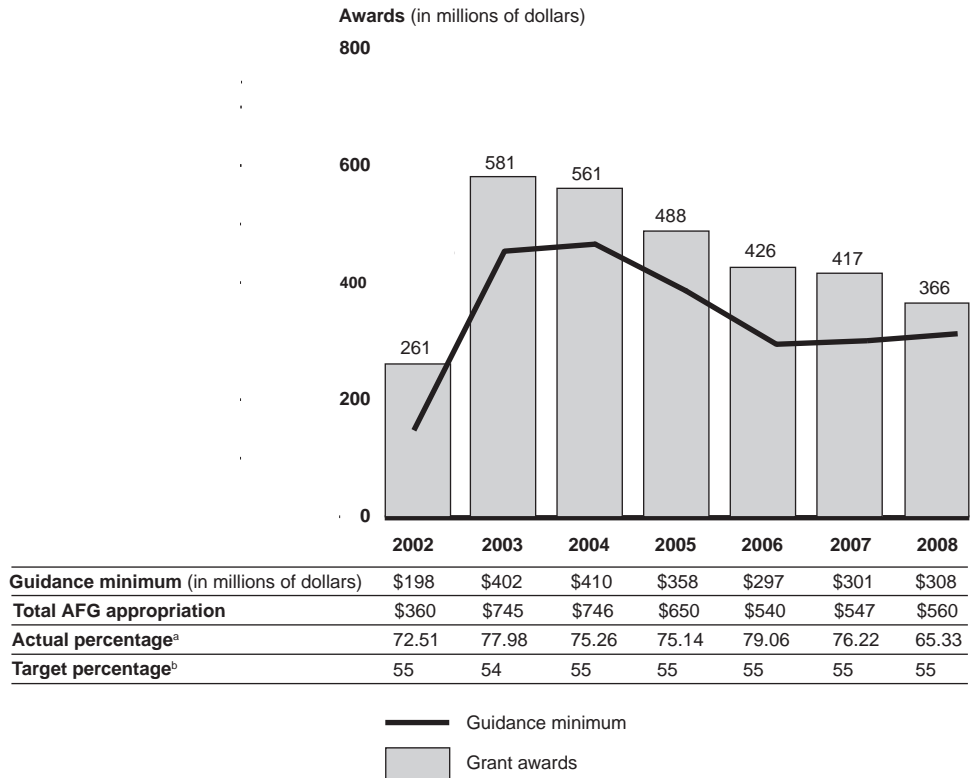
As of July 2009, FEMA Had Met Four of Five AFG Statutory Requirements for Distributing Fiscal Year 2008 Grants, but Had Not Fully Met One of Three Fiscal Year 2008 Program Requirements

Although FEMA Met Most AFG Statutory Requirements, It Did Not Fully Track EMS Data to Ensure That It Met One Statutory Requirement for Fiscal Year 2008

FEMA met four of five statutory requirements related to AFG grants for fiscal year 2008. First, as shown in figure 3, FEMA has consistently met the population-based statutory requirement for awarding fire grants to volunteer and combination fire departments from fiscal year 2002 through July of fiscal year 2008.²⁹

²⁹ Fiscal year 2002 is the first year FEMA began maintaining electronic data for the program.

Figure 3: Minimum Statutory Award Distribution Requirements and Actual Amounts FEMA Awarded to Volunteer and Combination Fire Departments under the AFG Program from Fiscal Years 2002 through 2008



Source: GAO analysis of FEMA data.

Note: Fire grant data for fiscal year 2008 are current as of July 2009. The fiscal year 2008 fire grant period closed on September 30, 2009, which is the end of fiscal year 2009.

^aActual percentage refers to actual awards as a percentage of the AFG appropriation.

^bTarget percentage refers to targeted awards as a percentage of the AFG appropriation.

Based on our review of fiscal year 2008 grant data, FEMA also met three other statutory funding distribution requirements for the AFG program, as identified in table 3.³⁰ Specifically, in fiscal year 2008, FEMA awarded about \$7.3 million (about 1.3 percent) of its \$560 million AFG appropriation to nonaffiliated EMS organizations and about \$132 million (about 23.5 percent) for vehicle grants, both of which fell below the

³⁰ Fire grant data for fiscal year 2008 are current as of July 2009. The fiscal year 2008 fire grant period closed on September 30, 2009, which is the end of fiscal year 2009.

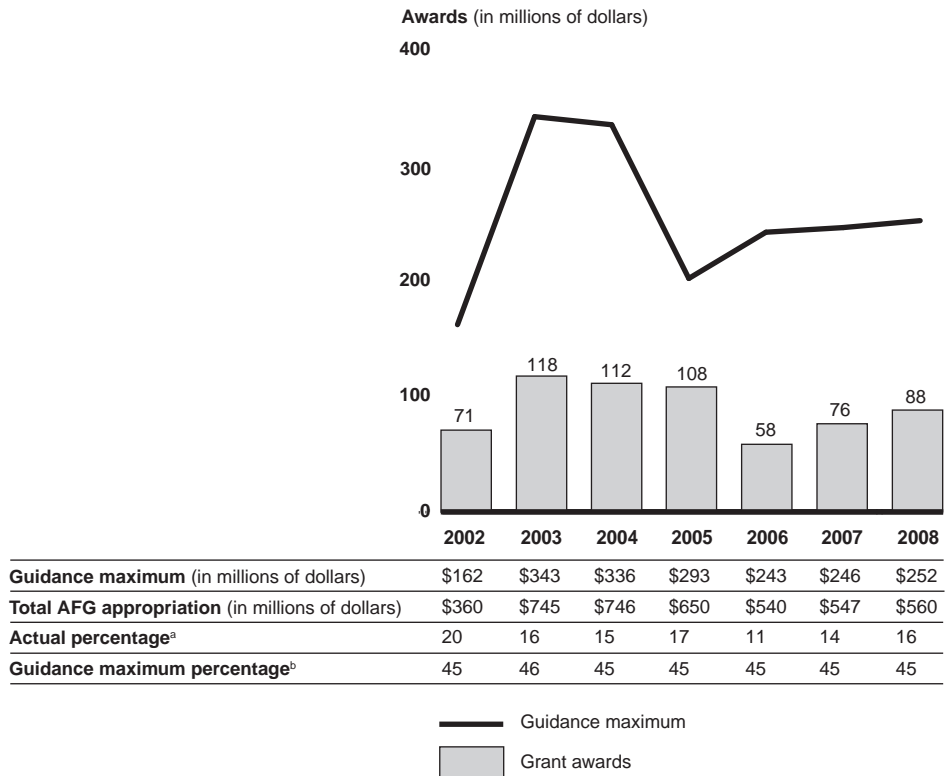
maximum ceilings established by the Fire Act. In addition, FEMA awarded about \$378,560 of its fiscal year 2008 AFG appropriation for foam firefighting equipment. According to a program specialist responsible for administering the AFG and SAFER grant programs, FEMA granted all requests that were submitted for foam firefighting equipment, since the total amount requested was below the \$3 million FEMA was required to make available for this purpose. Thus, in meeting these requirements, FEMA ensured that its grant awards were consistent with the funding percentages mandated by statute.

While FEMA has met four of the Fire Act's requirements for distributing grant awards, we were not able to determine whether it complied with the statutory requirement of awarding at least 3.5 percent of the appropriated AFG grant funds for EMS. Both nonaffiliated EMS organizations and fire departments are eligible to compete for EMS equipment and training. Although FEMA tracks the amount awarded to nonaffiliated EMS organizations (which are eligible for up to 2 percent of the appropriation), a program specialist responsible for administering the AFG and SAFER grant programs stated that FEMA does not track the amount of EMS equipment and training awarded to fire departments. He explained that FEMA's internal data system is not currently designed to capture this information and that obtaining the necessary data would require that FEMA perform laborious tasks, such as identifying each item that would qualify as EMS equipment and querying grant recipients to determine if any of this equipment funded by the AFG program was placed in their EMS vehicles. He stated that FEMA performed the research necessary to determine that it met the required funding level one year, but he could not provide any supporting documentation. However, he acknowledged that there may be alternatives for obtaining these data, such as asking applicants to estimate the percentage of grant funds that would be used for EMS during the grant application process. By developing and implementing a procedure for capturing the percentage of appropriated funds awarded to fire departments related to EMS equipment and training, FEMA would be better positioned to more readily determine if it met the statutory requirement that EMS account for at least 3.5 percent of the appropriated funds.

FEMA Met Two AFG Program Requirements and Fell Slightly Short of Meeting Another

The AFG guidance states that no more than 45 percent of the AFG funds may be awarded to career departments.³¹ As shown in figure 4, FEMA has consistently met this requirement from fiscal years 2002 through 2008.

Figure 4: Maximum AFG Program Award Distribution Requirements and Actual Awards by Career Departments from Fiscal Years 2002 through 2008



Source: GAO analysis of FEMA data.

Note: Fire grant data for fiscal year 2008 are current as of July 2009. The fiscal year 2008 fire grant period closed on September 30, 2009, which is the end of fiscal year 2009.

^aActual percentage refers to actual awards as a percentage of the AFG appropriation.

^bGuidance maximum percentage refers to guidance maximum awards as a percentage of the AFG appropriation.

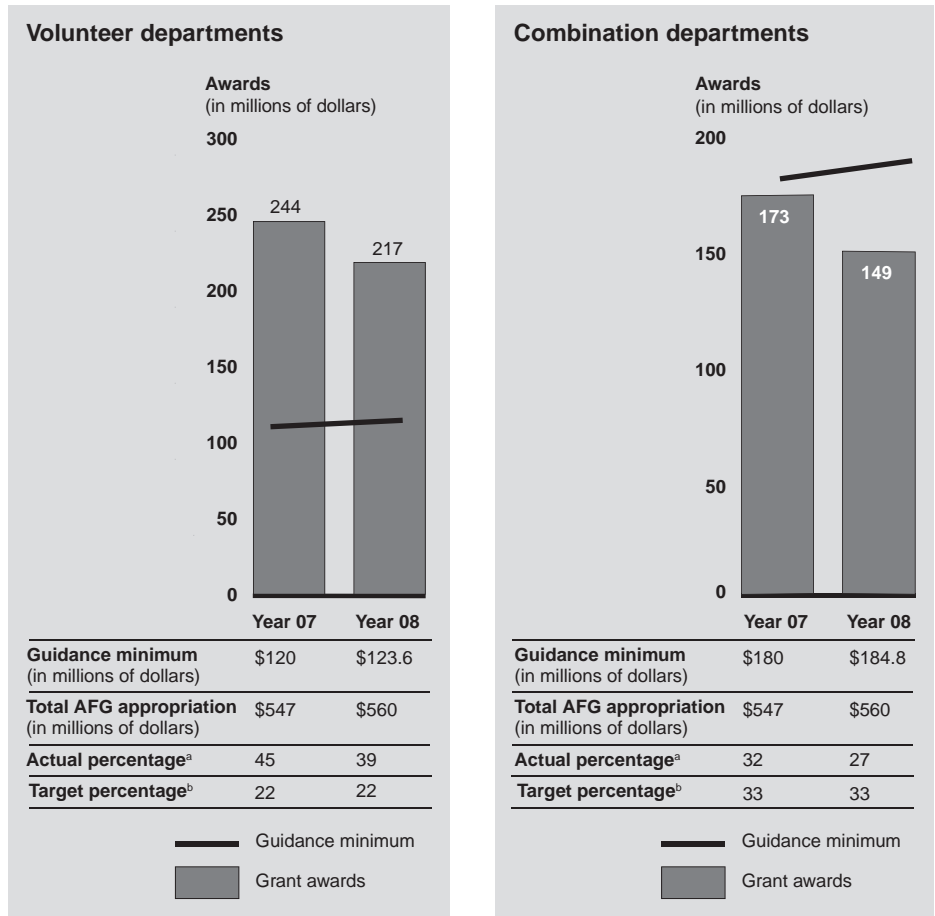
³¹ The 45 percent estimate applied to all fiscal years in the AFG program except fiscal year 2003. In fiscal year 2003, FEMA’s AFG program guidance stated that career departments would compete against other career departments for up to 46 percent of the available funding. Volunteer and combination departments would compete among each other for at least 54 percent of the available funding.

According to a program specialist responsible for administering the AFG and SAFER grant programs, in fiscal year 2007, OMB instructed the AFG Program Office to separate the percentage of funding given to volunteer and combination departments in proportion with the population that each type of department protects. Thus, FEMA incorporated this requirement in its program guidance. Specifically, the AFG 2008 grant guidance specified two requirements for FEMA to distribute grant awards: (1) volunteer departments are to receive at least 22 percent and (2) combination departments are to receive at least 33 percent of the total appropriation.³² While FEMA met the requirement to award at least 22 percent to volunteer fire departments in fiscal year 2008, it had not reached the minimum requirement of awarding at least 33 percent to combination departments as of July 2009. Specifically, FEMA awarded volunteer departments about 39 percent (\$217 million) of its \$560 million in fiscal year 2008 appropriated funds, but only awarded about 27 percent (\$149 million) of its appropriation to combination departments. We also analyzed fiscal year 2007 data to determine whether FEMA met the requirement related to distributing funds to combination departments since the separation between volunteer and combination departments occurred. FEMA fell slightly short of meeting this program requirement because it awarded combination fire departments about 32 percent (\$173 million) of the total appropriation of fiscal year 2007 grant funds—only 1 percent less than that required by program guidance (see fig. 5).³³ According to a program specialist responsible for administering the AFG and SAFER grant programs, FEMA attempts to comply with the guidance pertaining to population-based proportional grant funding, and he indicated that the shortfall in fiscal year 2007 awards to combination fire departments may have been an oversight.

³² Although FEMA's internal guidance specifies that no less than 22 percent and no less than 33 percent of the AFG appropriation go to volunteer and combination departments, respectively, the Fire Act does not require such a breakdown and only states that volunteer and combination departments collectively receive at least the amount proportional to the population they protect.

³³ FEMA awarded about 45 percent of fiscal year 2007 funds to volunteer departments.

Figure 5: AFG Guidance Requirements and Actual Awards for Volunteer and Combination Departments, Fiscal Years 2007 through 2008



Source: GAO analysis of FEMA data.

Note: Fire grant data for fiscal year 2008 are current as of July 2009. The fiscal year 2008 fire grant period closed on September 30, 2009, the end of fiscal year 2009.

^aActual percentage refers to actual awards as a percentage of the AFG appropriation.

^bTarget percentage refers to targeted awards as a percentage of the AFG appropriation.

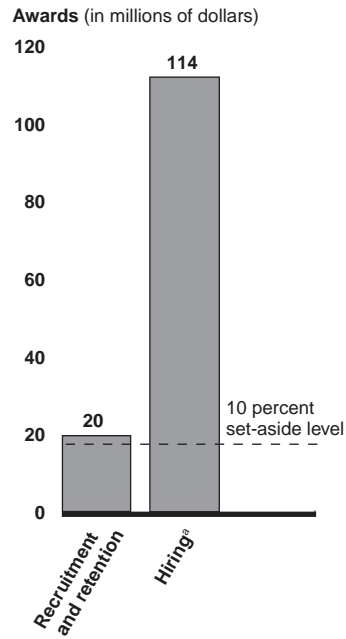
As of July 2009, FEMA Had Not Met the Statutory Requirement Related to Distributing Fiscal Year 2008 FP&S Grants, but Met This Requirement for Fiscal Year 2007 FP&S Grants

Because of delays in the approval of program guidance, no fiscal year 2008 FP&S grants had been awarded as of July 2009. Therefore, we reviewed FEMA's data related to its fiscal year 2007 FP&S grant funding distributions. According to these data, FEMA met the 5 percent minimum statutory requirement in fiscal year 2007 by awarding \$33,887,071, or about 6.2 percent, of the total AFG appropriation for FP&S grants. Thus, FEMA ensured that FP&S grant applicants received the percentage of funds mandated by statute.

FEMA Met Statutory Requirements for Distributing Fiscal Year 2008 SAFER Grants

In fiscal year 2008, FEMA met statutory requirements related to distributing funds for SAFER grants. FEMA is required to set aside 10 percent of the annual SAFER Act appropriation for all volunteer or majority volunteer fire departments to compete for hiring grants, which are otherwise open to all fire departments regardless of their career, combination or volunteer status. Recruitment and retention grants, which are open to volunteer and combination but not career departments, must also account for at least 10 percent of appropriated funding, in addition to the unused balance, if any, from the 10 percent hiring grant set-aside. FEMA complied with these requirements by awarding \$21 million, or about 11 percent, of the \$190 million in SAFER funding to volunteer and majority volunteer fire departments for hiring efforts. In addition, FEMA also awarded \$20 million, or about 11 percent, of the funds to volunteer and combination departments for the purpose of recruitment and retention. Thus, FEMA ensured that SAFER grant applicants received the percentage of funds mandated by statute (see fig. 6).

Figure 6: SAFER Statutory Requirements and Awards by Activity, Fiscal Year 2008



Actual award total (in millions of dollars)		\$134
Actual percentage^b	11	60
SAFER appropriation (in millions of dollars)	\$190	\$190

Activity
 - - - - Set-aside level

Source: GAO analysis of FEMA data.

Note: According to FEMA program officials, the fire grants data for fiscal year 2008 are current as of July 2009, and about 90 percent of the funding had been awarded at that time. The fiscal year 2008 fire grants period closed on September 30, 2009, the end of fiscal year 2009.

^aThe \$114 million includes hiring grant awards to all fire departments, whether career, combination or volunteer. Of this amount, FEMA awarded \$21 million to volunteer and majority volunteer fire departments, which is the portion attributable to the 10 percent hiring grant set-aside.

^bActual percentage refers to actual awards as a percentage of the appropriation.

FEMA Has Taken Actions to Assist Grant Applicants and Involves the Fire Service Community in Establishing Grant Criteria and Reviewing Grant Applications

FEMA has developed various tools to assist grant applicants with the application process and involves the nine major fire service organizations in developing criteria for annual fire grant funding priorities and in the peer review process. FEMA assists grant applicants by sponsoring workshops, publishing an online tutorial, and providing a toll-free hotline, among other actions. Each of the nine major fire service organizations sends representatives to serve on the annual criteria development panel, which recommends changes to the grant evaluation criteria and the funding priorities for the next fiscal year. During the peer review process, fire service practitioners independently rank the grant applications according to the evaluation elements recommended by the criteria development panel.

FEMA Has Assisted Grant Applicants through Workshops and Online Tutorials, among Other Actions

FEMA has developed various tools to assist fire grant applicants with the application process. According to a program specialist responsible for administering the AFG and SAFER grant programs, FEMA's regional offices sponsored approximately 400 AFG and SAFER workshops throughout the country in 2008. While not all of the 36 randomly selected fire grant applicants in our nonprobability sample had attended workshops, 6 grant applicants that had done so explained that they received basic information on the grant application and award process, such as a review of the grant guidance and funding priorities, and how to write the narrative section of the application. See appendix XI for a listing of fire grant applicants included in our interviews. FEMA has also contracted with the North American Fire Training Directors to provide a grant-writing training class to fire departments in all 50 states throughout the year. The training class explains the grant opportunities available through the AFG program, describes the application process, and provides detailed information to guide applicants in drafting narratives. The course includes a slide presentation with an instructor's guide and is designed to be about 4 to 6 hours in length. The contract allots up to \$5,000 per state, totaling \$250,000 for grant-writing technical assistance to be delivered from January 2009 through January 2010.

In addition, FEMA has created an online tutorial to guide AFG, SAFER, and FP&S applicants through the grant application process. Of the 36 applicants we interviewed, 20 applicants stated that they used online tutorials and 13 of them stated that the tutorial was helpful to a great or very great extent. Two of these applicants stated that the tutorials were useful to a great extent because they provide needed information on specific sections of the applications and help identify problematic areas.

Applicants seeking further assistance can call a toll-free hotline, which is staffed by contract personnel who have firefighting experience, or they can e-mail FEMA. FEMA provides technical assistance Monday through Friday for each of the three grant programs and also provides such assistance over the weekend for AFG applicants. In 2008, FEMA received an estimated total of 12,000 calls to the hotline and responded to an estimated 10,000 e-mails. FEMA has also established a mentoring program designed for departments that have unsuccessfully applied for fire grants for at least 5 years and offers this assistance to all departments that qualify. About half of the departments accept FEMA's offer to participate in the mentoring program, in which each participating department is paired with a former peer review panelist and given a tutorial to guide it through the process. As of May 2009, about 400 departments were being mentored and about 30 to 40 percent have been successful in receiving a subsequent grant. While FEMA allows applicants to hire a grant writer to assist them with the process, applicants are responsible for the accuracy of information provided by the grant writer. The grant writer fees included in the grant amount requested are reimbursable, providing that they are declared in the application and do not depend on award.

FEMA Involves the Fire Service Community in Establishing Grant Criteria and Funding Priorities and in Assessing Grant Applications

FEMA has taken a number of steps to involve the fire service community in the grant process. For example, each year, FEMA brings together a panel of fire service professionals representing the leadership of the nine major fire service organizations to conduct a criteria development meeting to develop the program's priorities for the coming year.³⁴ According to a program specialist responsible for administering the AFG and SAFER grant programs, the panel convenes for 3 days in the summer before the annual appropriations process and is composed of 3 representatives from each of the organizations, totaling roughly 50 participants, including FEMA staff. The panel is responsible for making recommendations to FEMA's AFG Program Office regarding the creation of program priorities, modification of program priorities, or both for all three fire grant programs—AFG, FP&S, and SAFER—as well as the development of criteria upon which the evaluation of grant applications is based. The panel's recommendations are placed in a report that panelists submit to

³⁴ The Fire Act requires FEMA to convene an annual criteria development panel composed of individuals who are nonfederal members of national fire service organizations. 15 U.S.C. § 2229(b)(13). Although the SAFER Act does not require FEMA to convene such a criteria development panel, FEMA nevertheless follows this procedure for SAFER grants.

Peer Review Panel Process Is
Designed to Support
Independent Assessment of
Application Merits

FEMA, which then incorporates the suggestions into the next fiscal year's grant guidance.

FEMA's peer review process—in which members of the nine major fire service organizations participate in assessing grant applications—also helps ensure that the fire service community is involved in making grant awards.³⁵ According to FEMA, the peer review process is a key component for ensuring fairness in awarding fire grants. Peer review panelists are to conduct an independent assessment of the merits of the applications based on the extent to which the proposed projects align with the grant year's funding priorities and meet the program's goals and objectives.

Before arriving at the peer review panel, participants are required to complete an online tutorial and test, and then submit their certification of a passing grade during the panel orientation. If a panelist has not completed the tutorial, he or she is required to do so at the panel orientation. When panelists arrive at orientation, they are required to sign and submit a statement declaring that they have no known or apparent conflicts of interest as well as a nondisclosure form agreeing to keep the results of the review confidential. The panelists are then divided into groups of four at different tables. FEMA instructs the panelists not to review applications if they know the applicant or if the applicant is from their state. In the event that a potential conflict of interest arises, FEMA replaces the entire batch of applications provided to the table of panelists with a new batch. FEMA also instructs the panelists not to share applicant information with any panelists other than those seated at their table. All panelists receive an evaluation sheet that lists the evaluation factors, along with a rubric that provides guidelines for rating grant applications against the evaluation factors. They also receive a copy of the grant guidance, which contains the funding priorities.

New panelists receive a 2-½-hour orientation by FEMA program staff, who provide instruction on distinguishing between average and good applications, the logistics of individual scoring and table discussion, and the possible need to reduce the requested grant amount, among other things. Once the orientation is completed, the panelists individually read

³⁵ The Fire Act requires FEMA, after consulting with national fire service organizations, to appoint a peer review panel composed of fire service personnel to evaluate grant applications. 15 U.S.C. § 2229(b)(15). Similarly, the SAFER Act requires SAFER hiring grants to be awarded based on a "neutral peer review process," a process that FEMA also follows for SAFER recruitment and retention grants. 15 U.S.C. § 2229a(a)(1)(G).

and score the narrative section of the applications as well as responses to other parts of the application, based on the applicable evaluation criteria. For example, for fiscal year 2008 AFG applications, panelists provided numerical scores on the basis of four evaluation factors stated in their score sheets, which were (1) project description, (2) cost/benefit of the proposed project, (3) financial need, and (4) effect of the proposed project on daily operations.³⁶

After each panelist at the table scores an application, the panelists discuss any differences of opinion and the merits or limitations of the application. Orientation facilitators inform panelists that the aim of the table discussion is not to arrive at a consensus, but rather to discuss each application as it pertains to each of the evaluation elements. If panelists are unable to reconcile any large scoring disparity (defined as 10 points or greater), they bring the dispute to the attention of a panel chair member who is responsible for ensuring that panelists document their discussion and indicate the scoring disparity on their scoring sheets. Panelists may amend their individual scores or choose to keep them unchanged on their evaluation sheets. FEMA files all of the panelists' evaluation sheets for each application, including the panelists' comments and recommendations to reduce the funding amount, reject, or award, with the applications. After evaluations are entered into FEMA's database, an average score is electronically generated that determines whether the application proceeds to the technical review process, which occurs concurrently in a separate room at the panel location for applications with the highest scores.

Fire Service Community Participates in Peer Review

FEMA AFG Program Office officials explained that the number of panelists varies from year to year and the number of nominees that they request from each of the nine major fire service organizations depends upon the amount of appropriated funding as well as the number of applications submitted. Typically, the organizations each nominate about 24 to 40 people for the AFG panel, 10 for the SAFER panel, and 24 to 28 for the FP&S panel. FEMA also sends letters to subgroups within the organizations that represent minorities to receive nominations to help diversify the panel. According to a program specialist responsible for administering the AFG and SAFER grant programs, while FEMA does not verify whether the organizations' nominees are qualified to attend the panel, it asks for the résumés of self-nominees or of those nominated by

³⁶ The score sheet factors correspond with the evaluation factors stated in the AFG grant guidance and application form for fiscal year 2008.

members of Congress. The official explained that in selecting the peer review panelists, FEMA considers availability to attend, racial diversity, and the ratio of new-to-repeat panelists. In fiscal year 2008, 285 people served on the AFG panel, 47 served on the SAFER panel, and 160 served on the FP&S panel. The official stated that FEMA considers panelists new if they have not participated in that particular grant program panel review, regardless of prior experience as a peer reviewer for another grant program. Although FEMA selects both new and returning panelists to review applications in any or all three grant categories, it tries to limit returning panelists to no more than one-third of the total panel composition. However, AFG Program Office officials may invite additional returning panelists if there are not enough confirmed attendees. Panelists are volunteers—although FEMA pays the entire cost of each panelist’s transportation, food, and lodging, it does not compensate panelists for any loss of income they may incur while serving on the panel. Lodging is typically provided at a federal training facility in Emmitsburg, Maryland, at no cost to the grant program.

In interviews with a nonprobability sample of 36 fire grant applicants, 22 applicants, or about 61 percent, stated that they had never been asked to serve on a panel. When asked whether they thought that the peer review process was fair and objective, 23 stated that it was, while 3 stated that it was not, and 10 did not know. In addition, 32 of the applicants stated that they believed that experience as a peer reviewer was beneficial to completing a grant application.

Although FEMA officials attempt to ensure that new peer review panelists make up two-thirds of the peer review panel each year, they stated that they do not currently undertake additional outreach activities themselves to encourage nominations of new panelists, such as notifying applicants of opportunities to serve on peer review panels during FEMA’s workshops or other assistance activities they sponsor for applicants. Rather, FEMA relies on the nine major fire service organizations for nominations of new panelists. AFG Program Office officials stated that while they strive to provide an even chance to as many fire departments and other organizations as possible to serve on peer review panels, representatives of departments that are invited sometimes fail to appear to serve on the panel without informing FEMA. Therefore, officials have invited some departments multiple times because they have proven to be reliable and good reviewers. They acknowledged that although FEMA does not currently limit the number of times that a department can send representatives to serve on the panels, establishing such a limit could expand opportunities for other departments to participate in the peer

review process. In addition, they also stated that they are considering conducting outreach efforts to expand peer review participation, such as announcing opportunities to serve on an upcoming peer review panel at workshops. In addition to expanding peer review participation, such efforts could benefit peer review panelists by allowing them to incorporate firsthand knowledge of the panel process into their future grant applications.

While FEMA Has Taken Actions to Help Make Its Grant Process More Accessible, FEMA Could Benefit from Improved Clarity and Consistency of Grant Guidance and Better Controls over the Process for Reviewing and Approving Grant Guidance

FEMA has taken actions—such as publishing grant guidance and applications online—to ensure that its grant process is more easily accessible to grant applicants, but the agency could enhance the clarity and consistency of its grant guidance and the controls over its review and approval process. While grant guidance priorities are generally perceived as clear by grant applicants we interviewed, we identified inconsistencies between the grant guidance and the grant applications and grant scoring matrix language. In addition, FEMA has experienced significant delays in issuing grant guidance, and the agency does not have controls to monitor the progress of the review process. Finally, the majority of fire grant applicants that we interviewed felt they received inadequate feedback on why their applications were rejected.

FEMA Publishes Annual Grant Guidance Online to Increase Accessibility

Before each annual grant application period, FEMA publishes updated grant guidance on its Web site and has created an online grant application, which is designed to be user-friendly. Publication of the annual grant guidance on the FEMA Web site makes it more accessible to potential applicants. The grant guidance provides applicants with an explanation of the information that will be required in the application, as well as informing them of any grant priorities for the fire grants for that year, such as whether training will be given priority. FEMA encourages applicants to apply for fire grants online because of delays and mistakes associated with processing paper applications. The electronic application has built-in “Help” screens and drop-down menus. Applicants for each of the three grant programs are required to answer a series of questions about their department and the particular grant they are applying for, as well as provide a narrative that discusses the impact to result from the proposed

use of the grant funds, among other things. Both the answers to the questions and the narrative are to be reviewed and scored by the peer review panel.

FEMA's Grant Guidance and Application Forms Generally Reflect Statutory Requirements for the Submission of Specific Information by Applicants, but May Not Obtain All Statutorily Required Information

The statutes authorizing the three fire grant programs contain specific grant application requirements, which require FEMA to collect and consider certain information from applicants in making grant awards; however, not all of these requirements are included in FEMA's grant guidance and application forms. For the AFG and FP&S grant programs, the Fire Act requires grant applicants to include (1) information demonstrating financial need, (2) an analysis of costs and benefits resulting from the assistance, (3) a list of other sources of federal funding received by the applicant to avoid duplicative funding, and (4) an agreement by the applicant to provide information to the National Fire Incident Reporting System during the grant period.³⁷ An additional requirement applies to the AFG program, requiring FEMA to consider the extent to which the grant would enhance the fire department's daily operations and the grant's impact on the protection of lives and property.³⁸

Based on our review, the AFG and FP&S fiscal year 2008 grant guidance and application forms instruct applicants to provide information consistent with the above statutory requirements, with one exception relating to the FP&S R&D activity, as indicated in table 4.

³⁷ 15 U.S.C. § 2229(b)(5).

³⁸ 15 U.S.C. § 2229(b)(14)(B).

Table 4: GAO Assessment of Whether FEMA Requested That AFG and FP&S Applicants Submit Statutorily Required Information with Their Grant Applications, Fiscal Year 2008

Statutory information requirements	Did FEMA request information during fiscal year 2008 grant cycle?		
	AFG applicants ^a	FP&S applicants for R&D activity	FP&S applicants for fire prevention and safety activity
1. Information that demonstrates the financial need of the applicant for the grant assistance	Yes	Yes	Yes
2. An analysis of the grant's costs and benefits with respect to public safety	Yes	No	Yes
3. An agreement by the applicant to report to the National Fire Incident Reporting System during the period of assistance	Yes	Yes	Yes
4. A list of other sources of federal funding received by the applicant to avoid duplicative funding	Yes	Yes	Yes
5. The extent to which the grant would enhance the applicant's daily operations and the grant's impact on protection of lives and property	Yes	N/A	N/A

Source: GAO.

Legend: N/A = not applicable.

^aWe did not assess a statutory requirement regarding AFG applications submitted by nonaffiliated EMS organizations. In applying the grant selection criteria to nonaffiliated EMS organizations, FEMA is required to consider whether other sources of federal funding are available to provide EMS assistance. 15 U.S.C. § 2229(b)(10)(F). Unlike the requirements we assessed, this provision does not require the applicant to submit any information, nor does it require FEMA to establish a separate evaluation criterion regarding EMS funding sources. Thus, we chose not to evaluate the absence of this requirement in the fiscal year 2008 AFG grant guidance.

FP&S grants cover two activities: (1) fire prevention and safety and (2) firefighter safety R&D.³⁹ However, FEMA grant guidance only instructed applicants to provide the statutorily required cost-benefit analysis for projects proposed under the fire prevention and safety activity, not the R&D activity. Apart from this exception, the grant guidance and applications forms for both the AFG and FP&S programs incorporate the Fire Act's information requirements. In particular, according to the grant guidance for both programs, fire departments that are awarded grants are to provide information to the National Fire Incident Reporting System during the grant period, as required by statute. In addition, the application forms for both grant programs require

³⁹ Fire departments are eligible to apply for assistance only in the fire prevention and safety activity. Public and private nonprofit organizations are eligible to apply for assistance in both activities.

applicants to identify other sources of federal funding they are receiving that may duplicate the purpose of their grant request. Although a program specialist responsible for administering the AFG and SAFER grant programs stated that few grant applicants receive grant awards from other sources, FEMA queries its internal records of all grant applicants to prevent making duplicate awards. The three remaining AFG statutory requirements—financial need information, a cost-benefit analysis, and an impact statement—appear as evaluation criteria in the AFG guidance that applicants are to address in their project narratives. The two remaining FP&S statutory requirements—financial need information and a cost-benefit analysis—appear as evaluation criteria for the fire prevention and safety activity, but the evaluation criteria for the R&D activity include only one of these two statutory requirements, financial need. By taking steps to ensure that all statutorily required information is included in the grant guidance and application forms, FEMA is better positioned to provide reasonable assurance that grants are awarded in accordance with the statute.

In addition, the SAFER Act also specifies certain information that applicants are required to submit, in addition to any other information required by FEMA. The statute requires each applicant to (1) provide assurances regarding diversity in hiring, (2) explain its inability to address the need without federal assistance, and (3) specify long-term retention plans after federal funding ends.⁴⁰ With respect to the latter requirement, SAFER hiring grant applicants are to specifically discuss how they plan to meet the statute's 5-year service commitment (i.e., 1-year of service for SAFER-funded firefighters after the 4-year funding period ends).⁴¹ Furthermore, SAFER hiring grant applicants are to address another statutory requirement, a commitment not to discriminate against firefighters serving as volunteers in other jurisdictions during off-duty hours.⁴²

Based on our review, the fiscal year 2008 SAFER grant guidance and application forms instruct applicants to provide information consistent with the above statutory requirements, although for SAFER recruitment

⁴⁰ 15 U.S.C. § 2229a(b)(2)-(3).

⁴¹ 15 U.S.C. § 2229a(b)(3)(B).

⁴² 15 U.S.C. § 2229a(b)(3)(B).

and retention grants, the guidance and application form only partially address one of the information requirements, as indicated in table 5.

Table 5: GAO Assessment of Whether FEMA Requested That SAFER Applicants Submit Statutorily Required Information with Their Grant Applications, Fiscal Year 2008

Statutory information requirements	Did FEMA request information during fiscal year 2008 grant cycle?	
	SAFER hiring grant applicants	SAFER recruitment and retention applicants
1. Assurances regarding diversity in hiring	Yes	Yes
2. Applicant's inability to meet the need without federal assistance	Yes	Yes
3. Long-term retention plans after federal funding ends	Yes	Partially
4. Ability to meet the statute's 5-year service commitment (i.e., 1 year of service for SAFER-funded firefighters after the 4-year funding period ends)	Yes	N/A
5. Applicant's commitment not to discriminate against firefighters serving as volunteers in other jurisdictions during off-duty hours	Yes	N/A

Source: GAO.

Legend: N/A = not applicable.

FEMA's guidance for SAFER hiring grants includes each of the statutory information requirements within the evaluation factors that applicants are to address in their project narratives. For example, each hiring grant applicant is to include a statement regarding how the applicant plans to meet the nonfederal match requirement for the 5-year service period, including any long-term plans to retain the new firefighter positions, as required by the statute.⁴³ Although the SAFER hiring grant guidance instructs applicants to submit all statutorily required information, the statement of long-term retention plans is less specific in the SAFER recruitment and retention grant guidance and application questions, which ask applicants to include "specifics about the recruitment and/or retention plan." Because this language gives applicants the option of providing specifics on recruitment or retention plans, FEMA may not receive information on applicant's long-term retention plans after federal funding ends, especially from applicants seeking grants for recruitment purposes. Clarifying the SAFER recruitment and retention grant guidance with

⁴³ The SAFER hiring grant guidance also includes specific default provisions if the applicant does not meet its 5-year service commitment.

respect to applicants' long-term retention plans could help FEMA ensure that it collects the information necessary to determine whether awarded grants used for recruitment or retention purposes will have a lasting impact after federal funding ends. FEMA does explicitly instruct applicants to address the other two statutory requirements—diversity in hiring and inability to meet the need without federal assistance—which apply to SAFER recruitment and retention grants.

Grant Priorities Are Generally Perceived as Clear by Grant Applicants, but Are Not Consistently Aligned with the Scoring Matrix and Grant Application Questions

Seventy-eight percent (28 of 36) of the grant applicants that we interviewed described the grant guidance as being clear to a great or to a very great extent, 7 said that it was clear to a moderate extent, and 1 applicant said that he did not know. For example, 1 applicant stated that the guidance was consistently well written and another commented that it was simple and user-friendly. However, 10 applicants provided suggestions for how FEMA could further clarify its grant guidance—including its grant priorities. For example, 1 suggested that priorities be more expressly stated so that he could make a more qualified decision on whether to apply. The fiscal year 2008 AFG program guidance does not summarize funding priorities for any activity other than for the vehicle acquisition program. Likewise, the fiscal year 2008 FP&S and SAFER program guidance also do not summarize funding priorities. AFG Program Office officials acknowledged that the fire grants program guidance could be made clearer, possibly by incorporating tables or charts highlighting program priorities.

Moreover, while FEMA's grant guidance and application questions for the AFG, FP&S, and SAFER grant programs generally incorporate statutory information requirements, priorities in the grant guidance are not always reflected in the scoring matrix and application questions. For example, the fiscal year 2008 SAFER guidance states that continuity—which refers to whether an applicant's recruitment and retention activities are designed to continue beyond the grants' period of performance—is a priority for recruitment and retention grants. However, there is no application question that addresses this priority, nor is there a scoring matrix value that corresponds to continuity. Further, the fiscal year 2008 AFG guidance for wellness and fitness grants prioritizes fitness and injury prevention projects over rehabilitation, but in the scoring matrix all wellness and fitness project categories are scored equally. Grant priorities/criteria in the guidance are updated every year based on the recommendations made by the criteria development panel. According to a program specialist responsible for administering the AFG and SAFER grant programs, it would be difficult to capture the concept of continuity in the form of a

question, and the misalignment regarding wellness and fitness priorities may have occurred because of insufficient oversight by FEMA.

It is important that FEMA ensure that its grant guidance is not only clear but also consistently aligned with the application questions and scoring matrix. According to the National Procurement Fraud Task Force,⁴⁴ grant funds are awarded to carry out goals and objectives as they are identified in the grant guidance. In order for there to be accurate and consistent alignment between the grant awards and guidance, the application questions and their weighted scoring values must also reflect the intentions of the grant program as stated in the guidance. Developing grant guidance and application questions that are consistent with funding priorities could help FEMA ensure that grant funds are awarded in accordance with the agency's priorities.

Review and Approval Process of Draft Fire Grant Guidance Is Not Documented and Monitored

FEMA's Section Chief for the FP&S program stated that although the FP&S grant guidance is to be issued in August or September at the start of each fiscal year, it has not been issued on time for the past 3 fiscal years—the review and approval process for the fiscal year 2008 grant guidance took over 17 months, and guidance was not issued until February 2009. See appendix XII for more detailed information about the time frames for the fiscal year 2008 fire grants process. Because of this delay, the peer review panel convened to assess grant applications in April 2009, and FEMA began awarding fiscal year 2008 FP&S awards in August 2009. FEMA program officials stated that because of the delays in the approval of the grant guidance, FEMA was unable to reserve classroom and dormitory space at the federal facility in Emmitsburg, Maryland, where prior peer review panels had met, and the panel met at a private hotel in Towson, Maryland, at a cost of about \$90,000. As a result of this expenditure, there were fewer funds to award to grant applicants.

According to FEMA's Office of Policy and Program Analysis, there is no systematic method for tracking the review and approval process for fire grant guidance, no internal deadlines,⁴⁵ and no documentation to help determine the cause for delays in the issuance of grant guidance. AFG

⁴⁴ National Procurement Fraud Task Force, *A Guide to Grant Oversight and Best Practices for Combating Grant Fraud* (Washington, D.C., February 2009).

⁴⁵ Although FEMA tries to issue its grant guidance on a regular schedule, it has not established official internal deadlines.

Program Office officials said that they are not fully aware of the review and approval process once the drafted guidance leaves the AFG Program Office and is sent to other offices within FEMA and DHS. They said that the delay in issuing the fiscal year 2008 FP&S guidance occurred when the FEMA Policy Coordinating Group found that the AFG Program Office did not possess a Paperwork Reduction Act clearance in order to collect information from others outside of the federal government.⁴⁶ In response, the AFG Program Office submitted a request for an emergency clearance, which OMB did not approve.⁴⁷ According to OMB officials, the clearance was denied because OMB believed that FEMA should go through proper channels to obtain a routine clearance for its fire grant program because FEMA had previously asked for other emergency clearances.⁴⁸ AFG Program Office officials stated that after denial of the emergency clearance, the AFG Program Office published the FP&S guidance despite not possessing the clearance, and the delay in issuing the FP&S guidance delayed the AFG grant application cycle because peer review panels cannot be held concurrently. AFG Program Office officials stated that they anticipate receiving the clearance for all three grant programs in the near future.

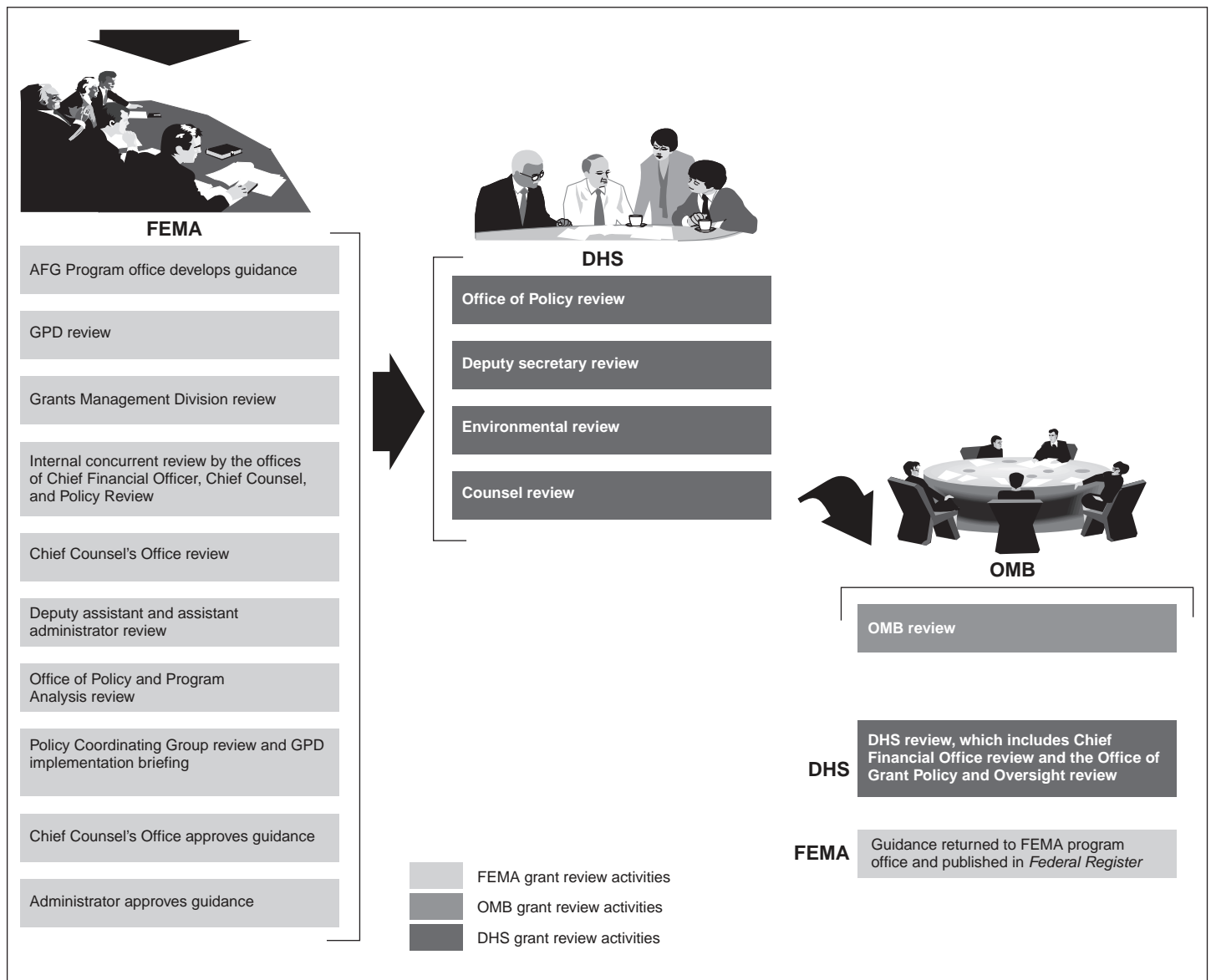
While neither FEMA nor DHS has documented the review and approval process, we analyzed information provided by interviewed officials and confirmed with them the guidance review and approval process shown in figure 7.

⁴⁶ According to a program specialist responsible for administering the AFG and SAFER grant programs, the Policy Coordinating Group is composed of officials from within various entities within the agency. The group meets periodically to review draft grant guidance.

⁴⁷ The Paperwork Reduction Act establishes the OMB review process that federal agencies are required to follow before collecting information from the public. See 44 U.S.C. §§ 3506-3507.

⁴⁸ OMB officials stated that obtaining a routine clearance typically requires about 120 days.

Figure 7: Grant Guidance Review and Approval Process



Sources: GAO analysis of FEMA data and Art Explosion (clip art).

While we did not specifically ask about this issue, 16 applicants with whom we spoke raised concerns regarding the uncertainty associated with the issuance of grant guidance and the notification of award decisions. These applicants explained that they often receive notifications that the grant period is open or receive grant awards significantly later than they had anticipated. In addition, nine of the 36 grant applicants suggested that

FEMA should award grants in a more timely way or provide more precise information on when or whether an award could be expected. Further, an official from one of the nine fire service organizations stated that uncertainties and delays could cause problems in requesting money for matching amounts from city governments to use for fire grant projects. In April 2004, we reported that timely grant awards are imperative to provide intended benefits.⁴⁹

Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government states that internal control and all transactions and other significant events need to be clearly documented, and that documentation should appear in management directives, administrative policies, or operating manuals. Such documentation may be in paper or electronic form and all documentation and records should be properly managed and maintained.⁵⁰ Furthermore, standard practices for program management state that defining milestones or deadlines, among other factors, are essential in providing a road map to effectively implementing a program.⁵¹ Given that there are no controls to routinely monitor the review and approval of grant guidance by FEMA, DHS, and OMB, FEMA has no systematic method for determining when guidance will be issued each year. When guidance is delayed, the entire grant process is delayed, which could affect grant applicants' ability to secure state funds for activities covered by the grant since they are unsure whether the grants will be awarded. In addition, when grant guidance is delayed, scheduling peer review panels is challenging for FEMA program officials and USFA and has resulted in loss of award funds due to increased administrative costs.

⁴⁹ GAO, *National Emergency Grants: Labor Is Instituting Changes to Improve Award Process, but Further Actions Are Required to Expedite Grant Awards and Improve Data*, [GAO-04-496](#) (Washington, D.C.: April 16, 2004).

⁵⁰ [GAO/AIMD-00-21.3.1](#).

⁵¹ The Project Management Institute, *The Standard for Program Management*© (2006). See also GAO, *Information Sharing Environment: Definition of the Results to be Achieved in Improving Terrorism-Related Information Sharing Is Needed to Guide Implementation and Assess Progress*, [GAO-08-492](#) (Washington, D.C.: June 25, 2008).

Grant Applicants Desire More Specific Feedback on Why Their Grant Applications Were Turned Down

Once the grant review process is completed, unsuccessful applicants receive letters notifying them of the reason(s) their applications were turned down for grant awards, but some applicants have stated that they would like more information on the reasons for their rejection. According to AFG Program Office officials, applicants receive rejection letters at the same time as grant awards are being announced. The officials further stated that sending rejection letters to thousands of applicants is time and resource intensive. The AFG Program Office has developed 16 templates to use in sending AFG applicants letters explaining the reasons for their rejection. Explanations that FEMA provides to unsuccessful applicants include (1) discrepancies between the itemized request and the narrative justification for those items, (2) an applicant or the specific activity for which grant funding was requested is ineligible for funding, or (3) incomplete fulfillment of the requirements of previous grant awards received by the applicant. These letters inform the applicants that there were an extremely high number of applications and a finite amount of funding, which resulted in many worthy applicants not being funded.

In certain cases, the information contained in these letters is more positive and does not provide detailed information on the reason for the rejection. For example, FEMA may send an applicant a letter explaining that while the peer review panelists' scores indicated that its application was generally good, the agency does not have enough funding to offer the applicant an award after awarding grants to applicants with higher scores. However, FEMA states that if it identifies any excess funding or if some of the applicants that have been offered a grant decline the offers, the agency might be able to fund the request. According to AFG Program Office officials, applicants are not allowed to appeal panelists' scores. Rather, they can only request reconsiderations because of processing issues. For example, they can argue that terminology in the grant guidance was unclear.

Four of the nine major fire service organizations expressed concern about the level of feedback provided to rejected applicants.⁵² One official stated that FEMA's denial letters lack specificity about why their applications were denied, while another official stated that rejected departments were frustrated with not knowing why their applications were rejected year

⁵² Representatives we interviewed from five major national fire service organizations did not mention specific concerns related to the level of feedback provided to rejected applicants.

after year. Another official suggested that FEMA publish a list of the top 10 reasons why grants are turned down in order to provide greater clarity to applicants.

Moreover, 61 percent of the 36 grant applicants that we interviewed (22 of 36) stated that the feedback they received from FEMA regarding why their applications were turned down was helpful to little or no extent. One applicant stated that he did not receive any feedback from FEMA and that his fire department had called the agency to learn the status of its application. In addition, 6 applicants stated that the feedback was helpful to some or to a moderate extent and another 6 stated that the feedback was helpful to a great or very great extent. However, 1 applicant reported not knowing the extent to which the feedback was helpful. Seventy-five percent (27 of 36) of grant applicants with whom we spoke suggested that FEMA's feedback should include specific reasons why the grant application was denied. For example, 3 grant applicants suggested that it would be helpful if FEMA provided information regarding the specific stage in the application review process where an application was rejected. One fire department suggested that FEMA cite whether an application contained a poorly written narrative or was rejected for another reason, such as a request for equipment that was not a funding priority. Another applicant suggested that peer reviewers provide applicants the reasons why their applications scored low, and another suggested that FEMA include information on available assistance for future grant cycles, such as the online tutorial or list of workshops.

Providing feedback to grant applicants is an important part of the fire grant program. In its 2007 report on the AFG program, the National Academy of Public Administration listed improving feedback to grant applicants as a strategic objective for the grant management process. The strategic objective is for FEMA to improve the feedback to unsuccessful candidates so that applicants can understand why they did not receive grants, thereby increasing participation and improving the quality of requested grants.⁵³ AFG Program Office officials acknowledged that they could strengthen efforts to improve feedback to applicants who are turned down for grants following the peer review process. According to the Director of the AFG program, FEMA could modify the feedback provided to unsuccessful applicants to better explain the reasons why applications

⁵³ National Academy of Public Administration, *Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program: Assessing Performance*.

were rejected. We have previously reported the need to provide clear feedback to unsuccessful applicants on the strengths and weaknesses of their grant applications.⁵⁴ Providing specific feedback to applicants regarding the reasons that they are denied grants could help FEMA strengthen future grant application processes and better position it to achieve its intended benefits of assisting fire departments that are most in need.

Conclusions

Through the years, the U.S. fire service community has experienced changes in its responsibilities to the public as well as decreases in local budget distribution, which underscore the need for fire departments nationwide to have the resources necessary to protect their communities. Through its fire grant programs, FEMA has an opportunity to assist fire departments that are struggling to meet their responsibilities. While FEMA distributed fire grants to a variety of applicants for a variety of activities, developing and implementing a procedure for capturing the percentage of appropriated funds awarded to fire departments related to EMS equipment and training would better position FEMA to more readily determine if it met the minimum amount established by statute. FEMA could improve the clarity and consistency of the grant review and award process by collecting all statutorily required information and eliminating inconsistencies between the guidance, the scoring matrix, and the application, which may confuse applicants. Additionally, by improving its internal controls to document and track the grant guidance review and approval against established milestones, FEMA could provide applicants the opportunity to plan for matching funds by determining when guidance will be issued each year. Finally, by providing more specific feedback and information on assistance, FEMA could help ensure that applicants have the opportunity to prepare better applications, and thus have a greater chance of being awarded grants in the future.

Recommendations for Executive Action

To ensure compliance with all AFG statutory requirements, we recommend that the Administrator of FEMA establish a procedure for tracking the percentage of grant funds awarded to fire departments for EMS purposes.

⁵⁴ GAO, *Health Resources and Services Administration: Many Underserved Areas Lack a Health Center Site, and the Health Center Program Needs More Oversight*, [GAO-08-723](#) (Washington, D.C.: Aug. 8, 2008).

In addition, to improve the clarity, consistency, and controls of the grant review and award process, we recommend that the Administrator of FEMA take the following three actions:

- Ensure that the priorities in the grant guidance are aligned with the scoring matrix and the grant application questions, and that FEMA requests applicants to submit all statutorily required information.
- Coordinate with the Secretary of Homeland Security to document the review and approval process for its grant guidance, develop a tracking system to monitor the progress of the review within FEMA and DHS, and set internal deadlines so that guidance can be issued in a timely manner.
- Inform unsuccessful applicants about the forms of assistance available to them in future grant cycles and provide more specific feedback to applicants that are turned down for grants following the peer review.

Agency Comments

We provided a draft of this report to DHS and FEMA for review and comment. On October 22, 2009, DHS provided written comments on the draft report, which are reprinted in appendix XIV. DHS concurred with our recommendations and is taking actions to address them. DHS stated that FEMA will examine the available options and adopt one for manually and electronically monitoring percentages of grant funds awarded to fire departments for emergency medical services purposes to ensure compliance. DHS also stated that FEMA will explore options and identify means for providing clear, concise, and consistent information to applicants on the funding priorities and statutorily required information. In addition, DHS stated that FEMA will work with applicable offices to enable a timely review and tracking of program guidance material. Further, DHS stated that additional training and outreach efforts are being developed to enhance feedback to applicants.

We are sending copies of this report to the Secretary of Homeland Security, Director of the Office of Management and Budget, interested congressional committees, and other interested parties. The report also will be available at no charge on the GAO Web site at <http://www.gao.gov>.

If you or your staff have any questions concerning this report, or wish to discuss these matters further, please contact me at (202) 512-8777 or jenkinswo@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional

Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report.
Key contributors to this report are listed in appendix XV.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "William O. Jenkins, Jr." The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

William O. Jenkins, Jr.
Director, Homeland Security and Justice

Appendix I: Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

The accompanying explanatory statement to the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2008,¹ mandates that we review the application and award process for Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) and Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) grants. Thus, we addressed the following questions:

- To what extent has the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) met statutory and program requirements for distributing the grant funds to a variety of applicants and activities?
- What actions has FEMA taken to provide assistance to grant applicants and involve the fire service community in the grant process?
- To what extent has FEMA taken actions to help ensure the fire grant process and related guidance are accessible, clear, and consistent with applicable statutory and program requirements?

To review the extent to which FEMA met statutory and program requirements for distributing fire grants to a variety of applicants and activities, we reviewed relevant statutory requirements from sections 33 and 34 of the Federal Fire Prevention and Control Act of 1974 (called the Fire Act and the SAFER Act, respectively, for purposes of this report). Based upon these statutes, we identified a total of eight statutory requirements that established specific percentages or dollar amounts designating how FEMA was to distribute funds among different grant applicants and activities. We also identified three relevant program requirements established in FEMA's grant guidance for the AFG, SAFER and Fire Prevention and Safety (FP&S) grant programs, which related to distributing grant funds among different categories of activities and applicants.² We then compared these statutory and program requirements to FEMA grant award data that stratified awards based on the type of fire

¹ Pub. L. No. 110-161, 121 Stat. 1844 (2007).

² Federal Emergency Management Agency, *Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program and Application Guidance*; Federal Emergency Management Agency, *Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program 2008 Fire Prevention and Safety Grants*; and Department of Homeland Security, *Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response Program and Application Guidance*.

department: volunteer, career, or combination³—and based on the type of activity, such as awards for vehicle acquisitions. FEMA began maintaining electronic fire grant award data in fiscal year 2002. FEMA’s fire grant award data are current as of July 2009, at which time FEMA was in the process of awarding fiscal year 2007 FP&S grants and fiscal year 2008 AFG and SAFER grants. These years were the latest for which grants had been awarded at the time of our review and for which we were able to determine FEMA’s compliance with statutory and program funding distribution requirements.⁴ In addition to analyzing compliance issues, we also analyzed FEMA’s annual listings of applications and awards for the AFG and FP&S grant programs from fiscal years 2002⁵ through 2008 and SAFER grant program from fiscal years 2005⁶ through 2008 to provide descriptive information on a number of other characteristics, such as the type of community served by the applicant—urban, suburban, or rural. We provided descriptive information on the type of community served because the Fire Act requires FEMA to distribute AFG grants to a variety of different fire departments based on such characteristics as the type of community served, although the statute did not provide a specific percentage of funds against which we could evaluate compliance for the community-based requirement. We also determined the number of times that departments have applied for and been awarded grants. The descriptive information regarding the distribution of grant awards appears in appendixes V through X and appendix XIII of this report. To assess the reliability of data provided by FEMA, we reviewed and discussed the sources of data with agency officials. We determined that the data were sufficiently reliable for the purposes of this report.

³ FEMA defines a volunteer fire department as one in which no members receive any compensation other than a length of service retirement program and insurance, whereas a career department is one in which all members are compensated for their services. A combination department is defined as having any number of both volunteer and career firefighters regardless of their proportion to one another. According to a FEMA program specialist responsible for administering the AFG and SAFER grant programs, combination departments also include paid on call/stipend departments. If a volunteer fire department provides stipends to its members or provides “pay-on-call” for its members, the department is considered to be combination.

⁴ Fire grant data for fiscal year 2007 and 2008 are current as of July 2009.

⁵ Although the first appropriation for the AFG grant program was made in fiscal year 2001, a program specialist responsible for administering the AFG and SAFER grant programs informed us that electronic data were not available until fiscal year 2002.

⁶ The first appropriation for the SAFER grant program was made in fiscal year 2005.

To determine the actions FEMA has taken to provide assistance to grant applicants and involve the fire service community in the grant process, we collected and reviewed pertinent FEMA documents, such as program guidance, and observed FEMA's fiscal year 2010 criteria development panel process and the fiscal year 2008 FP&S peer review panel process. We conducted interviews with officials from FEMA and the nine fire service organizations to determine the type of information FEMA provides to applicants on the grant application and review process.⁷ We analyzed the methods FEMA uses to inform applicants about the fire grant programs, including the various types of outreach and assistance that the agency provides to applicants. Specifically, we reviewed information on grant-writing workshops, online tutorials, technical support, and mentoring, among other forms of applicant outreach, and reviewed the contract between the North American Fire Training Directors and FEMA to provide additional grant-writing assistance to applicants. We also conducted interviews with officials from FEMA, the U.S. Fire Administration, and the nine fire service organizations to understand how FEMA establishes criteria for awarding grants to applicants. We analyzed the information regarding FEMA's procedures for selecting peer reviewers; the training that panelists receive before reviewing applications; and the measures FEMA takes to ensure that peer review panelists maintain independence, safeguard against any conflict of interest, and adhere to restrictions related to confidentiality. We analyzed peer review guidance and other AFG Program Office documents, such as the criteria development reports and panel application evaluation sheets, to determine the process through which peer reviewers score grant applications. We collected and analyzed information pertaining to the technical review process and observed the fiscal year 2008 FP&S subject matter specialists' portion of the technical review to determine how FEMA incorporates scores from the technical reviewers and makes final award decisions.

To evaluate the extent to which FEMA has taken actions to help ensure that the fire grant process and related guidance are accessible, clear, and consistent with applicable statutory and program requirements, we

⁷ In its grant guidance, FEMA identified the following nine major fire service organizations: the Congressional Fire Service Institute, the International Association of Arson Investigators, the International Association of Fire Chiefs, the International Association of Firefighters, the International Society of Fire Service Instructors, the North American Fire Training Directors, the National Association of State Fire Marshals, the National Fire Protection Association, and the National Volunteer Fire Council.

reviewed FEMA's methods of publishing grant guidance online and the online applications. We also identified statutory requirements pertaining to information applicants are required to submit in their fire grant applications and analyzed FEMA's fiscal year 2008 grant guidance and application forms to determine whether they consistently instructed applicants to submit the statutorily required information. We obtained and analyzed FEMA AFG Program Office documents, such as the scoring matrix and documents describing the prescreening process. We analyzed and compared the fire grant programs' funding priorities contained in fiscal year 2008 AFG and SAFER grant guidance and 2007 FP&S grant guidance with the application questions and the scoring matrix to determine the extent to which they were consistent based on criteria from the National Procurement Fraud Task Force.⁸ To determine whether FEMA's process for issuing grant guidance had adequate controls, we obtained and analyzed testimonial information regarding the approval and issuance of the program and application guidance for fiscal year 2008 for the AFG and SAFER programs and for fiscal years 2007 and 2008 for the FP&S grant program. We also developed a timeline depicting the grant application and review process. We compared the agency's process for documenting and monitoring the guidance approval process with criteria in *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*.⁹ Through our analysis of grant program documents for fiscal years 2007 and 2008 and our interviews with officials from the Office of Management and Budget, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), and FEMA, we obtained information about the approval and issuance of the program and application guidance as well as how grant decisions are announced. We analyzed the procedures that FEMA uses to announce grant decisions and the type of feedback it provides to unsuccessful applicants and determined the circumstances under which applicants may appeal FEMA's grant decisions. We compared the views of a nonprobability sample of 36 randomly selected fire grant applicants

⁸ National Procurement Fraud Task Force, *A Guide to Grant Oversight and Best Practices for Combating Grant Fraud*.

⁹ [GAO/AIMD-00-21.3.1](#). These standards, issued pursuant to the requirements of the Federal Managers' Financial Integrity Act of 1982 (FMFIA), provide the overall framework for establishing and maintaining internal control in the federal government. Also pursuant to FMFIA, the Office of Management and Budget issued Circular A-123, revised December 21, 2004, to provide the specific requirements for assessing the reporting on internal controls. Internal control standards and the definition of internal control in Circular A-123 are based on GAO's *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*.

regarding feedback to unsuccessful candidates, and reviewed the National Academy of Public Administration 2007 assessment of the AFG program.¹⁰

From June 22 through June 29, 2009, we conducted structured interviews by phone with fire chiefs and other officials knowledgeable about the fire grants program from a nonprobability sample of 36 randomly selected fire grant applicants that did or did not receive fiscal year 2008 funding for the AFG and SAFER grants and fiscal year 2007 funding for the FP&S grants. We obtained their perspectives on the application and award process. The sample included fire grant applicants across the continental United States and Alaska. We obtained a list of the universe of applicants from FEMA for the respective fiscal years, from which we randomly selected fire departments within seven grant categories: (1) awarded AFG applicant, (2) turned down AFG applicant following the peer review panel process, (3) turned down AFG applicant following the initial electronic screening process, (4) awarded FP&S applicant, (5) turned down FP&S applicant following the peer review panel process, (6) awarded SAFER applicant, and (7) turned down SAFER applicant following the peer review panel process. We conducted two pretest interviews in person with representatives of fire departments in South Carolina and Pennsylvania to further refine our questions. An independent GAO methodologist reviewed our questionnaire to identify and revise potentially biased questions. Although we are not able to generalize the results of the nonprobability sample to the general population of applicants, the questionnaire allowed for a series of open-ended and close-ended responses on the grant application and award process, including questions on the perceived fairness and objectivity of the grant programs. Because of the scope of our work, we reviewed the fire grant programs' application and award process, but did not assess the extent to which FEMA measures its performance in implementing these fire grant programs.

We conducted this performance audit from January 2009 through October 2009 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. To assess the reliability of data provided by DHS and FEMA on the fire grant applicants, review criteria, and award procedures, we reviewed and discussed the

¹⁰ National Academy of Public Administration, *Assistance to Firefighters Grant Program: Assessing Performance*.

sources of data with agency officials. We determined that the data were sufficiently reliable for the purposes of our review, and that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

Appendix II: Statutory Requirements for Fire Grants

The AFG, FP&S, and SAFER grant programs are authorized to award funds for a range of purposes to various eligible organizations. Statutory requirements pertaining to each grant program are shown in table 6.

Table 6: AFG, FP&S, and SAFER Statutory Requirements

	AFG	FP&S	SAFER
Statutory authority	Section 33 of Federal Fire Prevention and Control Act of 1974, 15 U.S.C. § 2229 (Fire Act).	Section 33 of Federal Fire Prevention and Control Act of 1974, 15 U.S.C. § 2229 (Fire Act).	Section 34 of Federal Fire Prevention and Control Act of 1974, 15 U.S.C. § 2229a (SAFER Act). (Program has a 10-year sunset; the authority to make grants ends on November 24, 2013.)
Purposes	Hiring firefighters. Training firefighters. Creating rapid intervention teams. Certifying fire inspectors. Establishing firefighter wellness and fitness programs. Funding emergency medical services (EMS) (at least 3.5 percent of appropriation). Acquiring firefighting vehicles (no more than 25 percent of appropriation). Acquiring firefighting equipment. Acquiring personal protective equipment. Modifying firefighter facilities. Enforcing fire codes. Educating the public about arson prevention and detection. Providing recruitment and retention incentives for volunteer firefighters.	Activities: Fire prevention and safety: Grants to fund fire prevention programs. Firefighter safety research and development (R&D): Grants to fund research to improve firefighter health and life safety.	Activities: Hiring grants: Hiring firefighters to meet industry standards and attain 24-hour staffing to provide adequate fire protection and fulfill traditional firefighting missions. Recruitment and retention (R&R) grants: Recruiting and retaining volunteer firefighters who have experience or training in both firefighting and emergency response.
Eligible recipients	Fire departments (volunteer, combined, and career). Nonaffiliated EMS organizations (nonprofit EMS organizations that are not affiliated with a hospital and that serve an area without adequate EMS protection by a fire department).	For fire prevention and safety grants: Fire departments. Non-fire department organizations that specialize in fire prevention, fire safety, and firefighter R&D. For R&D Grants: Non-fire department organizations that specialize in fire prevention, fire safety, and firefighter R&D.	For hiring grants: Fire departments (volunteer, combined, and career). For R&R grants: Fire departments (volunteer or combined, but not career). Local or state organizations that represent the interests of volunteer firefighters.

Appendix II: Statutory Requirements for Fire Grants

	AFG	FP&S	SAFER
Recipient limitations (per grant)	<p>Population based: Population under 500,000: \$1 million (may be waived based on extraordinary need). Population from 500,000 to 1 million: \$1.75 million (may be waived based on extraordinary need). Population over 1 million: \$2.75 million (no waiver). Total distribution: Total grants for a single recipient for a single fiscal year may not exceed \$2.75 million or 0.5 percent of appropriation, whichever is less (no waiver).</p>	<p>No FP&S grant may exceed \$1 million.</p>	<p>Hiring grants: \$100,000 per firefighter over 4 years, with annual adjustment for inflation starting fiscal year 2005.^a (Hiring grants are to supplement, not supplant, state and local funds.) Both grants: No grant if the applicant's budget has been reduced below 80 percent of its average funding level in the 3 years before the statute's enactment.^a</p>
Nonfederal match	<p>Population based: Population under 20,000: 5 percent. Population from 20,000 to 50,000: 10 percent. Population above 50,000: 20 percent.</p>	<p>Population based for fire departments: Population under 20,000: 5 percent. Population from 20,000 to 50,000: 10 percent. Population above 50,000: 20 percent. No match for non-fire departments.</p>	<p>Hiring grants: Escalating nonfederal match over 4-year grant period: Year 1: 10 percent. Year 2: 20 percent. Year 3: 50 percent. Year 4: 70 percent. Preference may be given to applicants that offer a higher nonfederal match.^b Applicant must commit to retaining funded firefighters for 1 year after federal assistance ends.^a R&R grants: No match specified.</p>

Appendix II: Statutory Requirements for Fire Grants

	AFG	FP&S	SAFER
Award procedure	<p>Annual meeting of criteria development panel.</p> <p>Annual grant guidelines published in the <i>Federal Register</i>.</p> <p>Applications must address financial need, cost-benefit analysis, national fire incident reporting systems data, and other federal support received by applicant.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> EMS organizations: FEMA shall consider the extent to which other sources of federal funding are available to provide the requested assistance. Fire departments: Criteria must include extent to which grant would enhance applicant's daily operations and grant's impact on protection of lives and property. <p>Peer review evaluation.</p> <p>Grant awards by FEMA.</p>	<p>Annual meeting of criteria development panel.</p> <p>Annual grant guidelines published in the <i>Federal Register</i>.</p> <p>Applications must address financial need, cost-benefit analysis, national fire incident reporting systems data, and other federal support received by applicant.</p> <p>Peer review evaluation.</p> <p>Grant awards by FEMA.</p>	<p>Both grants:</p> <p>While the statute does not require an annual meeting of the criteria development panel, or annual grant guidelines published in the <i>Federal Register</i>, FEMA follows this procedure for SAFER grants.</p> <p>Statute requires applicants to address</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> inability to meet need without federal assistance; long-term retention plans, including—for hiring grants—how applicant will meet the 1-year service commitment for funded firefighters after federal assistance ends; and commitment to diversity in hiring. <p>Hiring grants: Applicant must also address how it will ensure nondiscrimination against firefighters who engage in volunteer activities in another jurisdiction during off-duty hours.</p> <p>Peer review evaluation.</p> <p>Grant awards by FEMA.</p>
Funding distribution to different applicants and activities ^c	<p>Fire departments: Statute generally requires diversity based on type of fire department and community served. More specifically, statute requires that volunteer and combined fire departments receive a proportion of the total grant funding that is not less than the proportion of the U.S. population protected by those fire departments.</p> <p>Vehicle acquisition: Not more than 25 percent of appropriation.</p> <p>EMS services: At least 3.5 percent of appropriation (but nonaffiliated EMS organizations can only receive up to 2 percent of appropriation; fire departments eligible for the rest).</p> <p>A total of \$3 million to be made available for foam firefighting equipment in remote areas through fiscal year 2008.^d</p>	<p>At least 5 percent of AFG appropriation.</p>	<p>Hiring grants: Ten percent of appropriation to be set aside for volunteer fire departments (whole or majority).</p> <p>R&R grants: At least 10 percent of appropriation. (R&R grants also get any unused funds under the 10 percent hiring grant set-aside.)</p>

Appendix II: Statutory Requirements for Fire Grants

	AFG	FP&S	SAFER
FEMA program administration ^e	Program administration for AFG and FP&S may account for up to 3 percent of AFG appropriation.	Program administration for AFG and FP&S may account for up to 3 percent of AFG appropriation.	No amount specified for program administration in SAFER Act.

Source: GAO.

^aThe Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2009, Pub. L. No. 11-32, 123 Stat. 1859, 1882 (2009), authorized the Secretary of Homeland Security to grant waivers from this SAFER Act requirement in making grants for fiscal years 2009 or 2010.

^bThe American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, Pub. L. No. 111-5, Div. A., Title VI, § 603, 123 Stat. 115, 165 (2009), waived the SAFER Act's nonfederal match requirement for grant funds appropriated in fiscal years 2009 or 2010.

^cFunding distribution is based on funds appropriated under either section 33 of the Federal Fire Prevention and Control Act of 1974 (AFG and FP&S grants) or section 34 of the same act (SAFER grants).

^dThe \$3 million dollar funding requirement for foam firefighting equipment was enacted on December 6, 2003, as part of the United States Fire Administration Reauthorization Act of 2003, Pub. L. No. 108-169, § 205, 117 Stat. 2036, 2040 (2003).

^eAnnual appropriations acts have included different language for FEMA program administration than the authorizing statutes. For example, beginning in fiscal year 2005, annual appropriations acts have provided that program administration may not exceed 5 percent of the combined appropriation for activities under section 33 and section 34 of the Federal Fire Prevention and Control Act of 1974, which encompasses all three fire grant programs (AFG, FP&S, and SAFER).

Appendix III: Mission, Membership, and Description of Fire Service Organizations

Officials from the nine fire service organizations participate in the criteria development panel to recommend changes to the upcoming year's grant priorities, as well as nominate members to serve on the peer review panel. The organizations' missions and memberships represent a range of interests within the fire service community. (See table 7.)

Table 7: Mission, Membership, and Description of Fire Service Organizations

	Mission	Membership	Description
Congressional Fire Services Institute (CFSI)^a	To educate members of Congress about fire and life safety issues.	Forty-two national organization members who are firefighters, emergency services responders, manufacturers, or fire service leaders.	CFSI is a nonprofit, nonpartisan policy institute incorporated in Delaware in 1989. It educates and lobbies Congress on the basic needs and training of firefighters and emergency responders. The Congressional Fire Services Caucus has about 300 members.
International Association of Arson Investigators (IAAI)	To improve the professional development of fire and explosion investigators by being the global resource for fire investigation training, technology, and research.	7,500 fire and explosive investigators.	IAAI is a nonprofit association located in Crofton, Md., that provides resources for training, research, and technology for fire investigators around the world. The IAAI Foundation, Inc., seeks to improve arson prevention programs.
International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC)^b	To provide leadership to career and volunteer chiefs, chief fire officers, company officers, and managers of emergency service organizations throughout the international community—through vision, information, education, services, and representation—to enhance their professionalism and capabilities.	Roughly 12,500 chief fire and emergency officers. IAFC is a professional association of individuals who conduct fire investigations. IAFC provides resources for training, research, and technology for fire investigators around the world.	IAFC is a nonprofit association formed in 1873 and headquartered in Fairfax, Va. IAFC provides a forum to exchange ideas and materials on fire safety and wellness, management guidance and compliance, and training. It facilitates the criteria development panels.
International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF)	To organize firefighters and emergency medical or rescue workers and lobby on behalf of their interests in the areas of compensation, work environment, education, and safety.	There are over 292,000 full-time professional firefighters and paramedics, and more than 3,100 affiliates and their members in the United States and in Canada. IAFF also represents state and federal employees and fire and emergency medical workers employed at certain industrial facilities.	Formed in 1918 and headquartered in Washington, D.C., IAFF is a union that lobbies Congress and the Canadian Parliament on such issues as collective bargaining rights, staffing, line-of-duty deaths, health care, pensions, training, and equipment. In 2003, the association supported SAFER grant legislation to help pay for the costs associated with hiring new staff.

**Appendix III: Mission, Membership, and
Description of Fire Service Organizations**

	Mission	Membership	Description
International Society of Fire Service Instructors (ISFSI)	To develop fire instructors and trainers who prepare firefighters to protect their communities.	There are over 1,000 members who are fire service instructors and training officers, and thousands of members in state chapters and internationally.	ISFSI represents fire service instructors across the United States and supports them with networking opportunities and resources needed for instruction. However, ISFSI does not provide direct training or instruction on grant-writing programs. Located in Pleasant View, Tenn., ISFSI advocates on behalf of instructors' perspectives on legislative and regulatory issues, and it provides representation on standards committees and steering groups.
North American Fire Training Directors (NAFTD)	To promote the common interests of providing a quality fire training and educational experience for firefighters.	There is one member for each U.S. state and territory and each Canadian province, typically located in a university or state government office. Members serve as points of contact for fire training and education.	NAFTD serves as a forum for the enhancement of state, provincial, and territorial fire training and education for fire and rescue services and is headquartered in Washington, D.C. In 2009, FEMA signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the association to conduct grant application training for fire departments. The MOU provides \$250,000 for training, which is to be divided among the states.
National Association of State Fire Marshals (NASFM)	To protect human life, property, and the environment from fire. To improve the efficiency and effectiveness of state fire marshals' operations.	Members are state fire marshals, who are the most senior fire officials. Most members are appointed by their governors.	Headquartered in Washington, D.C., NASFM promotes standards, codes, and regulations for improved fire safety of consumer products, building materials, and construction; provides training for code enforcement officials; educates the public on fire prevention; and advocates for fire safety.
National Fire Protection Association (NFPA)	To reduce the worldwide burden of fire and other hazards on the quality of life by providing and advocating consensus codes and standards, research, training, and education.	Worldwide membership of more than 81,000, including 80 national trade and professional organizations.	NFPA is an international nonprofit membership association established in 1896 and headquartered in Quincy, Mass. It has developed and published over 300 consensus codes and standards, and offers statistical and data services through its Fire Analysis and Research Division, including needs assessments of the U.S. fire service, for DHS and USFA.

**Appendix III: Mission, Membership, and
Description of Fire Service Organizations**

	Mission	Membership	Description
National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC)	To provide a unified voice for volunteer fire/EMS organizations.	Comprises 49 state fire associations. Each appoints a member to serve as its state director and another member to serve as state alternate director. These individuals make up NVFC's Board of Directors. NVFC represents 25,000 to 30,000 fire departments, which include all volunteer and some combination departments.	Headquartered in Greenbelt, Md., NVFC is a nonprofit association representing volunteer fire, EMS, and rescue service organizations. It promotes the interests of state and local organizations at the national level and provides education for volunteer fire/EMS organizations. It also serves as an information source on legislation, standards, and regulatory issues and provides resources to fire departments.

Source: GAO.

Note: FEMA invites the cognizant organizations' officials to participate in the criteria development panel, and the officials are to provide FEMA with a list of nominations of organization members to serve on the peer review panels. Although there are both new and returning participants in the criteria development panels and peer review panels, returning peer review panelists are not to exceed 50 percent of the total number of participants. Organizations are eligible to receive FP&S grants, but not AFG or SAFER grants.

^aCFSI is the only organization that is ineligible to receive FP&S grants because of restrictions in its charter.

^bFEMA compensates IAFC through its allowable administrative cost under the AFG grant to facilitate the criteria development panels.

Appendix IV: Application and Award Process for Fire Grants

The AFG, FP&S, and SAFER grant programs are evaluated in three phases of review. The first phase is an automated scoring process to select competitive AFG grant applications, or a prescreening process for FP&S and SAFER grants. The second phase for all grants is a peer review panel process to evaluate the extent to which an application aligns with the grant year's funding priorities and meets the programs' goals and objectives. The third phase is a technical review panel process to determine technical feasibility, avoid duplication with state initiatives, and make any modifications to the potential award.

Automated Scoring and Prescreening Process

After the application period is closed, all fire grant applications undergo either an automated scoring process, where each application is ranked relative to the funding priorities described in the guidance, or a prescreening process, where each application is screened for eligibility. For example, for the AFG and SAFER grant programs, the AFG Program Office creates a scoring formula (following the criteria development panel's scoring matrix), which is then entered into a computerized system by FEMA's Information Technology Office. Through this formula, each application is scored and ranked electronically. For the AFG program, if an application for a project has a high-dollar item or activity that was ranked as a low priority, that item or activity may have adversely affected the scoring and thus may have taken the application out of the competitive range for peer review. FEMA officials stated that because more than 21,000 AFG applications are submitted every year and the AFG Program Office does not have the resources to review all of the applications, the number of applications it submits for peer review is the number of applications with the highest scores whose cumulative funding requests total 200 percent of the appropriated funding. In other words, AFG grants that go to peer review can total no more than twice the dollar value of the available grant amount.

SAFER applications also undergo an automated scoring and ranking process; however, FEMA submits all of them for peer review (1,314 applications for fiscal year 2008). Applications that best address the funding priorities score higher than applications that do not. Unlike the AFG automated scoring, which is used for the sole purpose of selecting applications for peer review, the automated score for SAFER grants accounts for one-half of the overall consideration provided each application, with the peer review accounting for the balance of the consideration.

Unlike AFG and SAFER grants, FP&S applications do not undergo an automated scoring and ranking process. Because of the smaller size of the FP&S program and the more technical and academic nature of some FP&S requests, the AFG Program Office manually screens for eligibility all applications submitted for the two FP&S activities, which are fire prevention and safety grants and R&D grants. Both the applicants and the projects are screened for eligibility based on statutory and programmatic eligibility criteria, and those found ineligible are removed from further consideration before the peer review process. For example, for-profit applicants and projects requesting fire suppression equipment or fire vehicles are considered ineligible. According to an AFG Program Office section chief, out of 2,637 FP&S applications submitted for fiscal year 2008 funding, 170 applications were considered ineligible before the peer review panel process and another 16 applications were found ineligible during the peer review and therefore were not scored.

Peer Review Process

Peer review panel participants are fire service professionals who are members of one or more of the nine major fire service organizations. The panel's goal is to evaluate the extent to which an application aligns with the grant year's funding priorities and meets the programs' goals and objectives. The AFG Program Office officials explained that FEMA requests that each organization nominate members to serve as peer review panelists. FEMA also sends letters to subgroups within the organizations that represent minorities to receive nominations to help diversify the panel. Although the officials select both new and returning panelists to review applications in any or all three grant categories, they attempt to limit returning panelists to no more than one-third of the total panel composition. However, FEMA may invite more experienced panelists if there are not enough confirmed attendees.

In the orientation for the peer review of fiscal year 2008 FP&S applications, new panelists completed a review of two mock applications and discussed them as a group to familiarize themselves with the review process. These simulated exercises for new panelists occur for the AFG and SAFER panels as well.

For fiscal year 2008 SAFER hiring grants, panelists also scored applications numerically according to six evaluation factors stated in their score sheets, which were the extent to which the application described (1) a plan to use firefighters and the specific benefit these firefighters will provide for the fire department and the community, (2) a risk to the community and current firefighters that will be significantly reduced with

grant funding, (3) the need for financial assistance, (4) a plan to recruit and hire minorities and women, (5) a long-range plan to make the nonfederal match and retain firefighters, and (6) a policy to prevent discrimination against firefighters who volunteer for other departments. For SAFER recruitment and retention grants, only the first four evaluation factors apply.¹

For fiscal year 2008 FP&S applications, panelists scored applications for the fire prevention and safety activity based on six evaluation factors stated in their score sheets using adjectives ranging from “Strongly Agree” to “Strongly Disagree,” which the AFG Program Office subsequently converts to numerical scores. The evaluation sheet contains six detailed evaluation factors: (1) financial need, (2) vulnerability statement, (3) implementation plan, (4) project evaluation plan, (5) sustainability, and (6) cost-benefit analysis.² For the FP&S research and development activity, panelists scored applications reflecting the degree to which they addressed the following evaluation factors: (1) study purpose(s), goals and objectives, and specific aims; (2) scientific and technical merit of the proposed research; (3) dissemination and implementation; (4) resources—people and time; (5) protection for human subjects; (6) financial need; and (7) impact on firefighter safety.³

Automated Scoring and Prescreening Process Results in Some Applications Not Undergoing Peer Review

In the House report accompanying DHS’s fiscal year 2008 appropriations bill, the House Committee on Appropriations raised concerns about the number of fire grant applications that did not reach the peer review stage (9,268 out of 20,972 according to the House report).⁴ In the subsequent explanatory statement accompanying DHS’s fiscal year 2008 appropriations act, both the House and Senate appropriations committees directed FEMA to provide fire grant applicants whose applications were

¹ The score sheet factors correspond with the evaluation factors stated in the SAFER grant guidance and application form for fiscal year 2008.

² The score sheet factors include six of the seven evaluation factors stated in the FP&S grant guidance for fiscal year 2008, but do not include the seventh factor related to an applicant’s past performance. However, FEMA’s Section Chief for the FP&S program advised us that FEMA’s Program Office considers past performance as part of its award consideration.

³ The score sheet factors correspond with the evaluation factors stated in the FP&S grant guidance and application form for fiscal year 2008.

⁴ H. Rep. No. 110-181, at 106 (2007).

not selected for peer review an official notification detailing the reasons for their rejection.⁵ A program specialist responsible for administering the AFG and SAFER grant programs stated that the agency sent all AFG applicants that submitted applications that were not peer reviewed a letter notifying them that their applications were not among those selected for the second phase of the competitive review. The letter explained that during the second phase, those applications that best addressed AFG's established funding priorities for each eligible activity were approved and forwarded for peer review and that the objective of peer review is to further ensure the best use of grant funds. According to AFG Program Office officials, in fiscal year 2008, about 21,000 AFG applications were submitted, of which 8,000 were subsequently not selected for peer review. FEMA offered the applicants an opportunity to receive a more detailed explanation. The officials stated that applicants that submitted about 7,000 of these applications⁶ requested additional information, and four FEMA contractors spent about 4 months gathering the information needed to send electronic responses to these applicants to clarify specifically why the applications did not meet the criteria for peer review.

To determine the types of applicants whose applications were rejected before the peer review process, we reviewed data provided by FEMA. For fiscal year 2008, we found that 4,489 applicants (or about 29 percent) of the 15,544 applicants were turned down for all applications they submitted for AFG funds through the automated scoring process, and consequently none of their applications were peer reviewed.⁷ Appendix XIII contains more detailed information about unsuccessful fire grant applicants by department type and community service area.

Technical Review Process

Fire grant applications that receive the highest scores by the peer review panels are submitted for technical review. The technical review process consists of reviews made by subject matter specialists, the AFG Program Office or grants management specialists, or state homeland security

⁵ Explanatory Statement, Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2008, Pub. L. No. 110-161, 121 Stat. 1844 (Dec. 26, 2007). The explanatory statement was published in the December 17, 2007, daily edition of the *Congressional Record*, and the congressional direction for this GAO study appears on page H16096.

⁶ Grant applicants may submit more than one application for the fire grant.

⁷ In fiscal year 2008, these 15,544 applicants submitted a total of 21,022 applications for AFG grants, as discussed above and in table 2.

representatives. The AFG Program Office has a group of subject matter specialists who review each potential award application to ensure that the project is technically feasible and that the application does not contain projects, activities, or items that are ineligible or otherwise not worthy of funding. In addition, they identify potential modifications to projects that would enhance the overall award, and identify applications that have scored outside the fundable range but should receive the award. The subject matter specialists review the entire application as well as the panelists' comments. Once they have completed their review, the AFG Program Office staff reviews each potential award before making a recommendation on whether to award a grant to the applicant. The AFG Program Office staff assesses the findings from the previous reviews, determines whether any duplicate applications exist, and validates the eligibility of both the applicant and the items requested.

Following the review by the AFG Program Office staff, grant applications that have been recommended for award are submitted to grants management specialists in FEMA's Grants Management Division. These specialists are responsible for reviewing the financial information in applications and for ensuring that the requested amounts are reasonable and calculated correctly. They also ensure that applicants have provided responses to a questionnaire that the Grants Management Division sends to applicants. The questionnaire solicits information such as whether any proposed reductions in the requested amount in the grant applications are acceptable and if the applicant is a recipient of other federal grants. These responses to the questionnaire, which are supplemental to the grant application, are processed internally by the Grants Management Division. The Grants Management Division might contact the grantee for additional follow-up or send the application back to the AFG Program Office, as appropriate. According to grants management specialists, their review typically requires only a couple of hours, but the approval process might take as long as a month or more, depending on how long applicants take to respond to the questionnaire and the extent to which follow-up information is necessary. Once the specialists approve the recommended applications for award, the applications are sent to the assistance officers in the Grants Management Division for approval, at which point the assistance officers obligate the awards.

Grant Awards Process

Although FEMA generally makes funding decisions using rank-order results from the peer review panel evaluation, it may deviate from the panel's scores and make funding decisions based on the type of department (career, combination, or volunteer), the size and character of

the community the applicant serves (urban, suburban, or rural), or both to satisfy statutory and programmatic funding goals.⁸ State homeland security offices may also review applications to ensure that the relevant proposed projects do not duplicate existing statewide programs. Since the number of submitted application requests exceeds the appropriated funding, applications reviewed within this final stage may not be awarded grants, despite falling within the fundable range.

FEMA announces these awards over several months as decisions are made, but does not make the awards in any specified order (i.e., by state, program, or any other characteristic). Awards are made until the funding is exhausted or the appropriation has expired.

⁸ For the AFG program, the Fire Act requires FEMA to ensure that awards are made to a variety of fire departments (volunteer, combination, and career) serving a variety of communities (urban, suburban, and rural). 15 U.S.C. § 2229(b)(9). More specifically, the Fire Act requires that volunteer and combination fire departments receive a proportion of the total AFG grant funding that is not less than the proportion of the U.S. population protected by those fire departments. 15 U.S.C. § 2229(b)(11). Like the Fire Act, the SAFER Act contains requirements for distributing grant funds between SAFER applicants. In particular, FEMA is required to set aside 10 percent of the annual SAFER Act appropriation for awarding hiring grants to volunteer or majority volunteer fire departments and at least another 10 percent of the appropriation for awarding recruitment and retention grants, which are available to volunteer and combination fire departments. If FEMA awards less than 10 percent of the appropriation for hiring grants to volunteer or majority volunteer fire departments, it is required to transfer any unused amounts for the purpose of awarding recruitment and retention grants. In this way, the statute ensures that volunteer, majority volunteer, and combination fire departments are eligible for at least 20 percent of the annual SAFER Act appropriation in either hiring or recruitment and retention grants. See 15 U.S.C. § 2229a(a)(1)(H), (a)(2).

Appendix V: AFG, SAFER, and FP&S Applicants and Award Distribution by State

Tables 8 and 9 show the AFG and SAFER applicants and award breakdown, respectively, by state for fiscal year 2008. Table 10 shows the FP&S applicants and award breakdown for fiscal year 2007.

Table 8: AFG Applicants and Award Breakdown by State for Fiscal Year 2008

State	Number of applicants per state	Number of awardees per state	Amount awarded per state	Percentage of total applicants ^a	Percentage of total awardees ^a	Percentage of total amount awarded ^a
Alabama	535	227	\$22,276,969	3	5	5
Alaska	42	12	990,051	0	0	0
Arizona	127	37	4,287,251	1	1	1
Arkansas	295	66	6,660,857	2	1	1
California	408	149	24,154,708	3	3	5
Colorado	134	28	2,265,389	1	1	0
Connecticut	182	51	6,781,557	1	1	1
Delaware	25	4	219,989	0	0	0
District of Columbia	1	1	1,171,200	0	0	0
Florida	220	65	6,573,027	1	1	1
Georgia	287	75	7,741,627	2	2	2
Guam	1	0	0	0	0	0
Hawaii	3	3	772,631	0	0	0
Idaho	95	22	2,428,091	1	0	1
Illinois	631	207	19,960,699	4	5	4
Indiana	367	116	12,054,648	2	3	3
Iowa	404	93	8,805,654	3	2	2
Kansas	205	54	3,623,808	1	1	1
Kentucky	459	132	16,392,887	3	3	4
Louisiana	211	62	5,977,714	1	1	1
Maine	201	54	4,490,287	1	1	1
Maryland	164	48	5,392,930	1	1	1
Massachusetts	238	87	8,603,909	2	2	2
Michigan	567	161	13,909,589	4	4	3
Minnesota	402	149	11,832,600	3	3	3
Mississippi	312	79	7,480,139	2	2	2
Missouri	380	116	10,772,152	2	3	2
Montana	144	41	4,112,281	1	1	1
Nebraska	136	32	3,981,401	1	1	1
Nevada	21	4	686,657	0	0	0

**Appendix V: AFG, SAFER, and FP&S
Applicants and Award Distribution by State**

State	Number of applicants per state	Number of awardees per state	Amount awarded per state	Percentage of total applicants^a	Percentage of total awardees^a	Percentage of total amount awarded^a
New Hampshire	96	26	2,623,388	1	1	1
New Jersey	478	111	11,715,646	3	2	3
New Mexico	72	11	966,542	0	0	0
New York	1,040	292	28,220,396	7	7	6
North Carolina	584	174	16,796,539	4	4	4
North Dakota	102	30	2,773,546	1	1	1
Northern Marianas	2	0	0	0	0	0
Ohio	772	238	24,770,332	5	5	5
Oklahoma	288	70	6,278,135	2	2	1
Oregon	170	58	7,879,448	1	1	2
Pennsylvania	1,698	422	37,301,086	11	9	8
Puerto Rico	7	1	74,080	0	0	0
Rhode Island	51	12	1,378,341	0	0	0
South Carolina	305	93	10,271,719	2	2	2
South Dakota	142	21	1,933,547	1	0	0
Tennessee	447	155	15,529,558	3	3	3
Texas	579	147	18,382,319	4	3	4
Utah	93	19	909,108	1	0	0
Vermont	83	13	1,046,581	1	0	0
Virgin Islands	1	0	0	0	0	0
Virginia	253	68	7,728,819	2	2	2
Washington	256	101	11,437,238	2	2	3
West Virginia	258	64	6,642,017	2	1	1
Wisconsin	524	175	13,830,445	3	4	3
Wyoming	46	10	1,023,328	0	0	0
Total	15,544	4,486	\$453,912,860			

Source: GAO analysis of FEMA data.

Notes: Fire grants data for fiscal year 2008 funding are current as of July 2009. The fiscal year 2008 fire grants period closed on September 30, 2009, the end of fiscal year 2009. State category includes U.S. territories and the District of Columbia.

^aSome percentages may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

**Appendix V: AFG, SAFER, and FP&S
Applicants and Award Distribution by State**

Table 9: SAFER Applicants and Awards Breakdown by State for Fiscal Year 2008

State	Number of applicants per state	Number of awardees per state	Amount awarded per state	Percentage of total applicants ^a	Percentage of total awardees ^a	Percentage of total amount awarded ^a
Alabama	31	7	\$6,418,057	2	3	5
Alaska	13	6	1,437,817	1	2	1
Arizona	33	9	4,011,700	3	4	3
Arkansas	14	2	1,873,118	1	1	1
California	44	7	3,738,490	3	3	3
Colorado	21	3	1,642,576	2	1	1
Connecticut	20	3	949,124	2	1	1
Delaware	2	1	398,400	0 ^b	0 ^c	0 ^d
Florida	46	17	14,743,143	4	7	11
Georgia	39	7	8,935,070	3	3	7
Hawaii	2	1	1,625,700	0 ^b	0 ^c	1
Idaho	14	1	309,121	1	0 ^c	0 ^d
Illinois	46	7	1,300,560	4	3	1
Indiana	19	3	2,926,260	1	1	2
Iowa	11	2	0	1	1	0
Kansas	10	3	1,464,897	1	1	1
Kentucky	27	4	1,335,180	2	2	1
Louisiana	16	3	3,743,171	1	1	3
Maine	10	2	535,040	1	1	0
Maryland	13	5	3,170,856	1	2	2
Massachusetts	23	5	1,823,240	2	2	1
Michigan	20	3	461,120	2	1	0 ^d
Minnesota	16	1	491,000	1	0 ^c	0 ^d
Mississippi	20	2	875,408	2	1	1
Missouri	31	6	1,549,494	2	2	1
Montana	18	5	2,748,540	1	2	2
Nebraska	3	1	1,950,840	0 ^b	0 ^c	1
Nevada	6	0	0	0 ^b	0	0
New Hampshire	10	1	8,350	1	0	0
New Jersey	52	6	3,724,428	4	2	3
New Mexico	10	1	108,380	1	0 ^c	0 ^d
New York	83	14	3,579,579	6	5	3
North Carolina	88	28	12,437,424	7	11	9
North Dakota	9	2	1,518,520	1	1	1

**Appendix V: AFG, SAFER, and FP&S
Applicants and Award Distribution by State**

State	Number of applicants per state	Number of awardees per state	Amount awarded per state	Percentage of total applicants^a	Percentage of total awardees^a	Percentage of total amount awarded^a
Northern Marianas	2	0	0	0 ^b	0	0
Ohio	47	7	3,520,462	4	3	3
Oklahoma	17	3	622,624	1	1	0
Oregon	22	5	2,015,452	2	2	2
Pennsylvania	88	13	2,283,522	7	5	2
Puerto Rico	1	0	0	0 ^b	0	0
Rhode Island	4	0	0	0 ^d	0	0
South Carolina	36	6	4,397,811	3	2	3
South Dakota	11	1	48,000	1	0	0
Tennessee	30	6	1,176,335	2	2	1
Texas	82	17	12,574,961	6	7	9
Utah	22	5	3,304,763	2	2	2
Vermont	1	0	0	0 ^b	0	0
Virginia	18	4	1,373,796	1	2	1
Washington	62	13	6,384,936	5	5	5
West Virginia	18	0	0	1	0	0
Wisconsin	19	3	2,275,980	1	1	2
Wyoming	5	4	2,329,174	0 ^b	2	2
Total	1,305	255	\$134,142,419			

Source: GAO analysis of FEMA data.

Notes: Fire grants data for fiscal year 2008 funding are current as of July 2009. The fiscal year 2008 fire grants period closed on September 30, 2009, the end of fiscal year 2009. State category includes Puerto Rico.

^aSome percentages may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

^bDue to rounding, it represents less than 0.5 percent of total applicants.

^cDue to rounding, it represents less than 0.5 percent of total awardees.

^dDue to rounding, it represents less than 0.5 percent of total amount awarded.

**Appendix V: AFG, SAFER, and FP&S
Applicants and Award Distribution by State**

Table 10: FP&S Applicants and Awards Breakdown by State for Fiscal Year 2007

State	Number of applicants per state	Number of awardees per state	Amount awarded per state	Percentage of total applicants ^a	Percentage of total awardees ^a	Percentage of total amount awarded ^a
Alabama	58	7	\$227,665	2	3	1
Alaska	15	1	13,500	1	0	0
Arizona	42	8	1,454,191	2	4	4
Arkansas	21	2	27,345	1	1	0
California	115	13	2,387,151	5	6	7
Colorado	33	3	289,975	1	1	1
Connecticut	44	4	191,475	2	2	1
Delaware	4	1	362,500	0	0	1
District of Columbia	11	3	2,157,899	0	1	6
Florida	80	7	1,489,251	3	3	4
Georgia	45	3	88,543	2	1	0
Guam	1	0	0	0	0	0
Hawaii	3	0	0	0	0	0
Idaho	22	2	17,640	1	1	0
Illinois	111	9	3,056,161	4	4	9
Indiana	55	6	920,017	2	3	3
Iowa	29	3	90,130	1	1	0
Kansas	26	2	42,583	1	1	0
Kentucky	62	5	204,859	2	2	1
Louisiana	47	6	859,596	2	3	3
Maine	19	1	152,356	1	0	0
Maryland	41	7	4,350,211	2	3	13
Massachusetts	65	5	1,515,733	3	2	4
Michigan	101	10	350,949	4	5	1
Minnesota	34	3	171,669	1	1	1
Mississippi	39	5	1,343,325	2	2	4
Missouri	53	6	1,469,079	2	3	4
Montana	22	0	0	1	0	0
Nebraska	15	2	64,852	1	1	0
Nevada	15	1	142,320	1	0	0
New Hampshire	23	1	23,818	1	0	0
New Jersey	94	6	111,343	4	3	0
New Mexico	13	0	0	1	0	0
New York	163	13	1,899,522	6	6	6

**Appendix V: AFG, SAFER, and FP&S
Applicants and Award Distribution by State**

State	Number of applicants per state	Number of awardees per state	Amount awarded per state	Percentage of total applicants^a	Percentage of total awardees^a	Percentage of total amount awarded^a
North Carolina	84	11	1,392,988	3	5	4
North Dakota	10	1	8,873	0	0	0
Northern Marianas	1	0	0	0	0	0
Ohio	144	9	1,268,207	6	4	4
Oklahoma	27	2	30,660	1	1	0
Oregon	46	4	859,015	2	2	3
Pennsylvania	233	12	683,422	9	6	2
Puerto Rico	2	0	0	0	0	0
Rhode Island	10	2	147,333	0	1	0
South Carolina	42	1	23,893	2	0	0
South Dakota	6	1	121,670	0	0	0
Tennessee	61	3	952,790	2	1	3
Texas	101	6	1,295,561	4	3	4
Utah	19	1	11,697	1	0	0
Vermont	6	1	12,454	0	0	0
Virgin Islands	1	0	0	0	0	0
Virginia	58	7	1,361,389	2	3	4
Washington	50	5	97,859	2	2	0
West Virginia	31	2	101,280	1	1	0
Wisconsin	59	1	13,534	2	0	0
Wyoming	11	1	28,788	0	0	0
Total	2,523	215	\$33,887,071			

Source: GAO analysis of FEMA data.

Notes: FP&S application and award numbers are for fiscal year 2007 funding and reflect all fiscal year 2007 awards made through July 2009. No fiscal year 2008 FP&S grants had been awarded as of July 2009. State category includes U.S. territories and the District of Columbia.

^aSome percentages may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

Appendix VI: Distribution of AFG, SAFER, and FP&S Awards by Department Type, Fiscal Years 2002 through 2008

Tables 11, 12, and 13 show the distribution of AFG, SAFER, and FP&S awards, respectively, from fiscal years 2002 to 2008 by department types (e.g., career, combination, volunteer, paid on call/stipend, or a combination of these).

Table 11: Distribution of AFG Awards by Department Type for Fiscal Years 2002 through 2008

Fiscal years/AFG awards	Department type				Total	
	Career	Combination	Volunteer	Paid on call/stipend		
2002	Amount awarded ^a	\$70,975,002	\$80,591,004	\$180,449,110	0	\$332,015,115
	Percentage of total amount awarded ^a	21	24	54	0	
2003	Amount awarded ^a	\$117,486,153	\$150,940,511	\$430,043,841	0	\$698,470,505
	Percentage of total amount awarded ^a	17	22	62	0	
2004	Amount awarded ^a	\$111,473,064	\$152,205,706	\$378,816,933	\$30,385,478	\$672,881,182
	Percentage of total amount awarded ^a	17	23	56	5	
2005	Amount awarded ^a	\$108,111,730	\$144,726,028	\$311,965,746	\$31,745,810	\$596,549,314
	Percentage of total amount awarded ^a	18	24	52	5	
2006	Amount awarded ^a	\$58,454,814	\$121,880,485	\$272,820,480	\$31,442,977	\$484,598,756
	Percentage of total amount awarded ^a	12	25	56	6	
2007	Amount awarded ^a	\$76,218,273	\$142,548,951	\$243,652,237	\$30,729,293	\$493,148,754
	Percentage of total amount awarded ^a	15	29	49	6	
2008	Amount awarded ^a	\$88,077,419	\$122,344,945	\$216,741,884	\$26,748,612	\$453,912,860
	Percentage of total amount awarded ^a	19	27	48	6	

Source: GAO analysis of FEMA data.

Note: Fire grants data for fiscal year 2008 are current as of July 2009. The fiscal year 2008 fire grants period closed on September 30, 2009, the end of fiscal year 2009.

^aThe sum of the dollars awarded by department may not equal the total amount due to rounding. Some percentages may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

**Appendix VI: Distribution of AFG, SAFER,
and FP&S Awards by Department Type, Fiscal
Years 2002 through 2008**

Table 12: Distribution of SAFER Awards by Department Type for Fiscal Years 2005 through 2008

Department type	FY2005		FY2006		FY2007		FY2008	
	Amount awarded	Percentage of total amount awarded ^a	Amount awarded	Percentage of total amount awarded ^a	Amount awarded	Percentage of total amount awarded ^a	Amount awarded	Percentage of total amount awarded ^a
Career	\$32,133,168	51	\$43,607,369	43	\$35,486,504	33	\$68,188,502	51
Combination	25,218,789	40	47,125,704	46	60,656,387	57	51,407,312	38
Volunteer	4,805,687	8	7,370,261	7	6,212,534	6	7,128,112	5
Interest Organization	1,341,457	2	3,355,484	3	4,972,327	5	7,418,493	6
Total	\$63,499,101		\$101,458,818		\$107,327,752		\$134,142,419	

Source: GAO analysis of FEMA data.

Notes: The SAFER Act was enacted on November 24, 2003, and the first appropriation was made in fiscal year 2005. Fire grants data for fiscal year 2008 are current as of July 2009. The fiscal year 2008 fire grants period closed on September 30, 2009, the end of fiscal year 2009.

^aSome percentages may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

Table 13: Distribution of FP&S Awards by Department Type for Fiscal Years 2005 through 2007

Department type	2005		2006		2007	
	Amount awarded	Percentage of total amount awarded ^a	Amount awarded	Percentage of total amount awarded ^a	Amount awarded	Percentage of total amount awarded ^a
Career	\$6,905,847	21	\$6,250,783	17	\$1,845,331	5
Combination	3,019,939	9	2,268,050	6	1,560,303	5
Volunteer	1,362,946	4	1,815,343	5	789,123	2
Paid on call/stipend	658,543	2	109,782	0	36,072	0
Interest organization	21,134,765	64	26,821,628	72	29,656,242	88
Total	\$33,082,040		\$37,265,586		\$33,887,071	

Source: GAO analysis of FEMA data.

Notes: FEMA did not provide FP&S application and award information by department type for fiscal years 2002 through 2004. Fiscal year 2007 FP&S grants reflect awards made through July 2009. No fiscal year 2008 FP&S grants had been awarded as of July 2009.

^aSome percentages may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

Appendix VII: Distribution of AFG, SAFER, and FP&S Awards by Community Service Area, Fiscal Years 2002 through 2008

Tables 14, 15, and 16 show the distribution of AFG, SAFER, and FP&S awards, respectively, from fiscal years 2002 to 2008 by community service area (e.g., rural, suburban, and urban).

Table 14: Distribution of AFG Awards by Community Service Area for Fiscal Years 2002 through 2008

Fiscal years/AFG awards	Service area			Total	
	Urban	Suburban	Rural		
2002	Amount awarded ^a	\$40,377,302	\$77,031,109	\$214,074,511	\$331,482,921
	Percentage of total amount awarded ^a	12	23	64	
2003	Amount awarded ^a	\$47,066,785	\$121,647,167	\$529,756,553	\$698,470,505
	Percentage of total amount awarded ^a	7	17	76	
2004	Amount awarded ^a	\$34,407,348	\$118,467,285	\$520,006,549	\$672,881,182
	Percentage of total amount awarded ^a	5	18	77	
2005	Amount awarded ^a	\$63,453,509	\$119,669,234	\$413,426,571	\$596,549,314
	Percentage of total amount awarded ^a	11	20	69	
2006	Amount awarded ^a	\$36,692,506	\$88,412,349	\$358,877,634	\$483,982,489
	Percentage of total amount awarded ^a	8	18	74	
2007	Amount awarded ^a	\$55,174,641	\$96,482,911	\$341,491,202	\$493,148,754
	Percentage of total amount awarded ^a	11	20	69	
2008	Amount awarded ^a	\$57,881,399	\$90,957,326	\$305,074,135	\$453,912,860
	Percentage of total amount awarded ^a	13	20	67	

Source: GAO analysis of FEMA data.

Note: Fire grants data for fiscal year 2008 funding are current as of July 2009. The fiscal year 2008 fire grants period closed on September 30, 2009, the end of fiscal year 2009.

^aThe sum of the dollars awarded by department may not equal the total amount due to rounding. Some percentages may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

**Appendix VII: Distribution of AFG, SAFER,
and FP&S Awards by Community Service
Area, Fiscal Years 2002 through 2008**

Table 15: Distribution of SAFER Awards by Community Service Area for Fiscal Years 2005 through 2008

Service area	2005		2006		2007		2008	
	Amount awarded	Percentage of total amount awarded ^a	Amount awarded	Percentage of total amount awarded ^a	Amount awarded	Percentage of total amount awarded ^a	Amount awarded	Percentage of total amount awarded ^a
Urban	\$17,629,425	28	\$21,440,571	21	\$13,764,694	13	\$40,939,468	31
Suburban	29,942,758	47	47,783,221	47	61,453,851	57	55,888,003	42
Rural	14,585,461	23	23,050,246	23	27,136,880	25	28,514,628	21
Other ^b	1,341,457	2	9,184,780	9	4,972,327	5	8,800,320	7
Total	\$63,499,101		\$101,458,818		\$107,327,752		\$134,142,419	

Source: GAO analysis of FEMA data.

Notes: The SAFER Act was enacted on November 24, 2003, and the first appropriation was made in fiscal year 2005. Fire grants data for fiscal year 2008 funding are current as of July 2009. The fiscal year 2008 fire grants period closed on September 30, 2009, the end of fiscal year 2009.

^aSome percentages may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

^b“Other” represents organizations without a community service area affiliation, such as local, regional, or statewide organizations.

Table 16: Distribution of FP&S Awards by Community Service Area for Fiscal Years 2005 through 2007

Service area	2005		2006		2007	
	Amount awarded	Percentage of total amount awarded ^a	Amount awarded	Percentage of total amount awarded ^a	Amount awarded	Percentage of total amount awarded ^a
Urban	\$6,773,144	20	\$5,449,955	15	\$5,793,376	17
Suburban	3,115,200	9	3,458,314	9	3,339,585	10
Rural	4,327,820	13	3,406,300	9	2,238,615	7
Other ^b	18,865,876	57	24,951,017	67	22,515,495	66
Total	\$33,082,040		\$37,265,586		\$33,887,071	

Source: GAO analysis of FEMA data.

Note: FEMA did not provide FP&S application and award information by community service area for fiscal years 2002 through 2004. Fiscal year 2007 FP&S grants reflect awards made through July 2009. No fiscal year 2008 FP&S grants had been awarded as of July 2009.

^aSome percentages may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

^b“Other” represents organizations without a community service area affiliation, such as private and nonprofit organizations.

Appendix VIII: Distribution of AFG Awards by Activity, Fiscal Years 2002 through 2008

Table 17 shows the distribution of AFG awards by activity (e.g., operations and safety, vehicle acquisition, and regional) for fiscal years 2002 through 2008. The amount of funding provided for operations and safety activities is consistently higher than that spent on regional activities and vehicle acquisition. Fiscal year 2008 funding for operations and safety grants amounted to \$273.1 million out of the total \$453.9 million grant awards. Grant funding for vehicle acquisition and regional applications was \$131.7 million and \$49.2 million, respectively.

Table 17: Distribution of AFG Awards by Activity for Fiscal Years 2002 through 2008

Fiscal years/AFG awards		Activity					Total
		Emergency medical services	Fire prevention	Operation and safety	Vehicle acquisition	Regional	
2002	Amount awarded ^a	\$3,016,445	\$9,870,333	\$280,051,832	\$39,119,506	0	\$332,058,115
	Percentage of total amount awarded ^a	1	3	84	12		
2003	Amount awarded ^a	\$4,275,001	\$13,326,524	\$496,501,088	\$184,367,892	0	\$698,470,505
	Percentage of total amount awarded ^a	1	2	71	26		
2004	Amount awarded ^a	0	\$7,905,672	\$464,734,642	\$200,240,868	0	\$672,881,182
	Percentage of total amount awarded ^a		1	69	30		
2005	Amount awarded ^a	0	0	\$437,125,917	\$159,423,397	0	\$596,549,314
	Percentage of total amount awarded ^a			73	27		
2006	Amount awarded ^a	0	0	\$311,002,879	\$133,624,780	\$39,971,097	\$484,598,756
	Percentage of total amount awarded ^a			64	28	8	
2007	Amount awarded ^a	0	0	\$299,241,655	\$143,783,353	\$50,123,746	\$493,148,754
	Percentage of total amount awarded ^a			61	29	10	
2008	Amount awarded ^a	0	0	\$273,102,841	\$131,651,375	\$49,158,644	\$453,912,860
	Percentage of total amount awarded ^a			60	29	11	

Source: GAO analysis of FEMA data.

Note: Fire grants data for fiscal year 2008 funding are current as of July 2009. The fiscal year 2008 fire grants closed on September 30, 2009, the end of fiscal year 2009.

^aThe sum of the dollars awarded by department may not equal the total amount due to rounding. Some percentages may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

Appendix IX: Distribution of AFG, SAFER, and FP&S Awards and Funding by Department Type

Tables 18 and 19 show the distribution of AFG and SAFER awards and funding, respectively, by department type for fiscal year 2008. Table 20 shows the distribution of FP&S awards and funding by department type for fiscal year 2007.

Table 18: Distribution of AFG Awards and Funding by Department Type for Fiscal Year 2008

dollars in millions

Department type	Number of applications submitted	Number of awards	Amount awarded	Average award	Percentage of total applications ^a	Percentage of total awards ^a
Career	2,534	686	\$88.08	\$128,392.74	12	14
Combination	4,681	1,105	122.34	110,719.41	22	23
Volunteer	12,313	2,655	216.74	81,635.36	59	55
Paid on call/ stipend	1,494	359	26.75	74,508.67	7	7
Total	21,022	4,805	\$453.91			

Source: GAO Analysis of FEMA data.

Note: Fire grants data for fiscal year 2008 funding are current as of July 2009. The fiscal year 2008 fire grants period closed on September 30, 2009, the end of fiscal year 2009.

^aSome percentages may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

Table 19: Distribution of SAFER Grant Awards and Funding by Department Type for Fiscal Year 2008

dollars in millions

Department type	Number of applications submitted	Number of awards	Amount awarded	Average award	Percentage of total applications ^a	Percentage of total awards ^a
Career	229	67	\$68.19	\$1,017,738.84	17	26
Combination	631	121	51.41	424,853.82	48	47
Volunteer	426	53	7.13	134,492.68	32	21
Interest organization	28	14	7.42	529,892.36	2	5
Total	1,314	255	\$134.14			

Source: GAO analysis of FEMA data.

Note: Fire grants data for fiscal year 2008 funding are current as of July 2009. The fiscal year 2008 fire grants period closed on September 30, 2009, the end of fiscal year 2009.

^aSome percentages may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

**Appendix IX: Distribution of AFG, SAFER,
and FP&S Awards and Funding by
Department Type**

Table 20: Distribution of FP&S Awards and Funding by Department Type for Fiscal Year 2007

dollars in millions

Department type	Number of applications submitted	Number of awards	Amount awarded	Average award	Percentage of total applications^a	Percentage of total awards^a
Career	585	48	\$1.85	\$38,444.40	23	22
Combination	723	49	1.56	31,842.92	28	23
Volunteer	711	34	0.79	23,209.50	28	16
Paid on call/ stipend	67	1	0.04	36,072.00	3	0
Other ^b	475	84	29.66	353,050.50	19	39
Total	2,561	216	\$33.89			

Source: GAO analysis of FEMA data.

Note: FP&S application and award data are from fiscal year 2007 and reflect all fiscal year 2007 awards made through July 2009. No fiscal year 2008 FP&S grants had been awarded as of July 2009.

^aSome percentages may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

^b“Other” represents organizations without a community service area affiliation, such as private and nonprofit organizations.

Appendix X: Distribution of AFG, SAFER, and FP&S Awards and Funding by Community Service Area

Tables 21 and 22 show the distribution of AFG and SAFER awards, respectively, by service area for fiscal year 2008. Table 23 shows the distribution of FP&S awards by service area for fiscal year 2007.

Table 21: Distribution of AFG Grant Awards and Funding by Community Service Area for Fiscal Year 2008

dollars in millions

Service area	Number of applications submitted	Number of awards	Amount awarded	Average award	Percentage of total applications ^a	Percentage of total awards ^a
Urban	1,366	358	\$57.88	\$161,679.89	6	7
Suburban	3,357	806	90.96	112,850.28	16	17
Rural	16,299	3,641	305.07	83,788.56	78	76
Total	21,022	4,805	\$453.91			

Source: GAO analysis of FEMA data.

Note: Fire grants data for fiscal year 2008 funding are current as of July 2009. The fiscal year 2008 fire grants period closed on September 30, 2009, the end of fiscal year 2009.

^aSome percentages may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

Table 22: Distribution of SAFER Awards and Funding by Community Service Area for Fiscal Year 2008

dollars in millions

Service area	Number of applications submitted	Number of awards	Amount awarded	Average award	Percentage of total applications ^a	Percentage of total awards ^a
Urban	152	45	\$40.94	\$909,765.96	12	18
Suburban	461	92	55.89	607,478.29	35	36
Rural	670	101	28.51	282,323.05	51	40
Other ^b	31	17	8.80	517,665.88	2	7
Total	1,314	255	\$134.14			

Source: GAO analysis of FEMA data.

Note: Fire grants data for fiscal year 2008 funding are current as of July 2009. The fiscal year 2008 fire grants period closed on September 30, 2009, the end of fiscal year 2009.

^aSome percentages may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

^b"Other" represents organizations without a community service area affiliation, such as local, regional, or statewide organizations.

**Appendix X: Distribution of AFG, SAFER, and
FP&S Awards and Funding by Community
Service Area**

Table 23: Distribution of FP&S Awards and Funding by Community Service Area for Fiscal Year 2007

dollars in millions

Service area	Number of applications submitted	Number of awards	Amount awarded	Average award	Percentage of total applications^a	Percentage of total awards^a
Urban	482	53	\$5.79	\$109,308.98	19	25
Suburban	778	56	3.34	59,635.45	30	26
Rural	1,109	66	2.24	33,918.41	43	31
Other ^b	192	41	22.52	549,158.41	7	19
Total	2,561	216	\$33.89			

Source: GAO analysis of FEMA data.

Note: FP&S application and award numbers are for fiscal year 2007 funding and reflect all fiscal year 2007 awards made through July 2009. No fiscal year 2008 FP&S grants had been awarded as of July 2009.

^aSome percentages may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

^b“Other” represents organizations without a community service area affiliation, such as private and nonprofit organizations.

Appendix XI: Fire Grant Applicants in Nonprobability Sample

We conducted structured interviews with randomly selected applicants that applied for fiscal year 2008 funding for the AFG and SAFER grants and fiscal year 2007 funding for the FP&S grants to discuss various aspects of FEMA's grant application and award process. (See table 24.)

Table 24: Fire Grant Applicants in Nonprobability Sample

	Organization name	Department type	City	State
1	Bear Creek Volunteer Fire Department	Volunteer	Seward	Alaska
2	Brentwood Fire Department	Career	Brentwood	Tennessee
3	Center Point Fire District	Career	Birmingham	Alabama
4	Champaign Fire Department	Career	Champaign	Illinois
5	Chippewa Township Fire Department	Combination	Doylestown	Ohio
6	City of Melrose Fire Department	Career	Melrose	Massachusetts
7	Clark County Fire District #9 East County Fire and Rescue	Combination	Camas	Washington
8	Cowlitz #2 Fire and Rescue	Combination	Kelso	Washington
9	DeFuniak Springs Fire Department	Combination	DeFuniak Springs	Florida
10	Delaware Volunteer Firemen's Association	N/A	Dover	Delaware
11	Dickinson County EMS	Career	Abilene	Kansas
12	East Olympia Fire District #6	Combination	Olympia	Washington
13	Forman Fire Protection District	Volunteer	Manito	Illinois
14	Gates Fire District	Combination	Rochester	New York
15	Hamden Fire Department	Combination	Hamden	Connecticut
16	Hardin County EMS	Career	Elizabethtown	Kentucky
17	Haycock Fire Company #1	Volunteer	Quakertown	Pennsylvania
18	Honea Path Fire Department	Volunteer	Honea Path	South Carolina
19	Konawa Volunteer Fire Department	Volunteer	Konawa	Oklahoma
20	Lenoir City Fire Department	Career	Lenoir City	Tennessee
21	Lyndon Station Fire and Rescue	Paid on call/stipend	Lyndon Station	Wisconsin
22	Mission Township Fire Department	Combination	Topeka	Kansas
23	Monroe Fire Department	Career	Monroe	Louisiana
24	Natick Fire Department	Career	Natick	Massachusetts
25	Northampton Fire Department	Career	Northampton	Massachusetts
26	Philadelphia Fire Department	Combination	Philadelphia	Mississippi
27	Plainville Fire Department	Volunteer	Plainville	Kansas
28	Pricetown Volunteer Fire Department	Volunteer	Weston	West Virginia
29	Riverton Fire Protection District	Volunteer	Riverton	Wyoming
30	Seguin Fire Department	Combination	Seguin	Texas
31	Shortsville Fire Department	Volunteer	Shortsville	New York

**Appendix XI: Fire Grant Applicants in
Nonprobability Sample**

	Organization name	Department type	City	State
32	Stockland Fire Protection District	Volunteer	Milford	Illinois
33	Town of North Haven	Combination	North Haven	Connecticut
34	Vineland Fire Department	Combination	Vineland	New Jersey
35	Waco Community Volunteer Fire Department	Volunteer	Waco	North Carolina
36	Westhampton Fire Department	Volunteer	Westhampton	Massachusetts

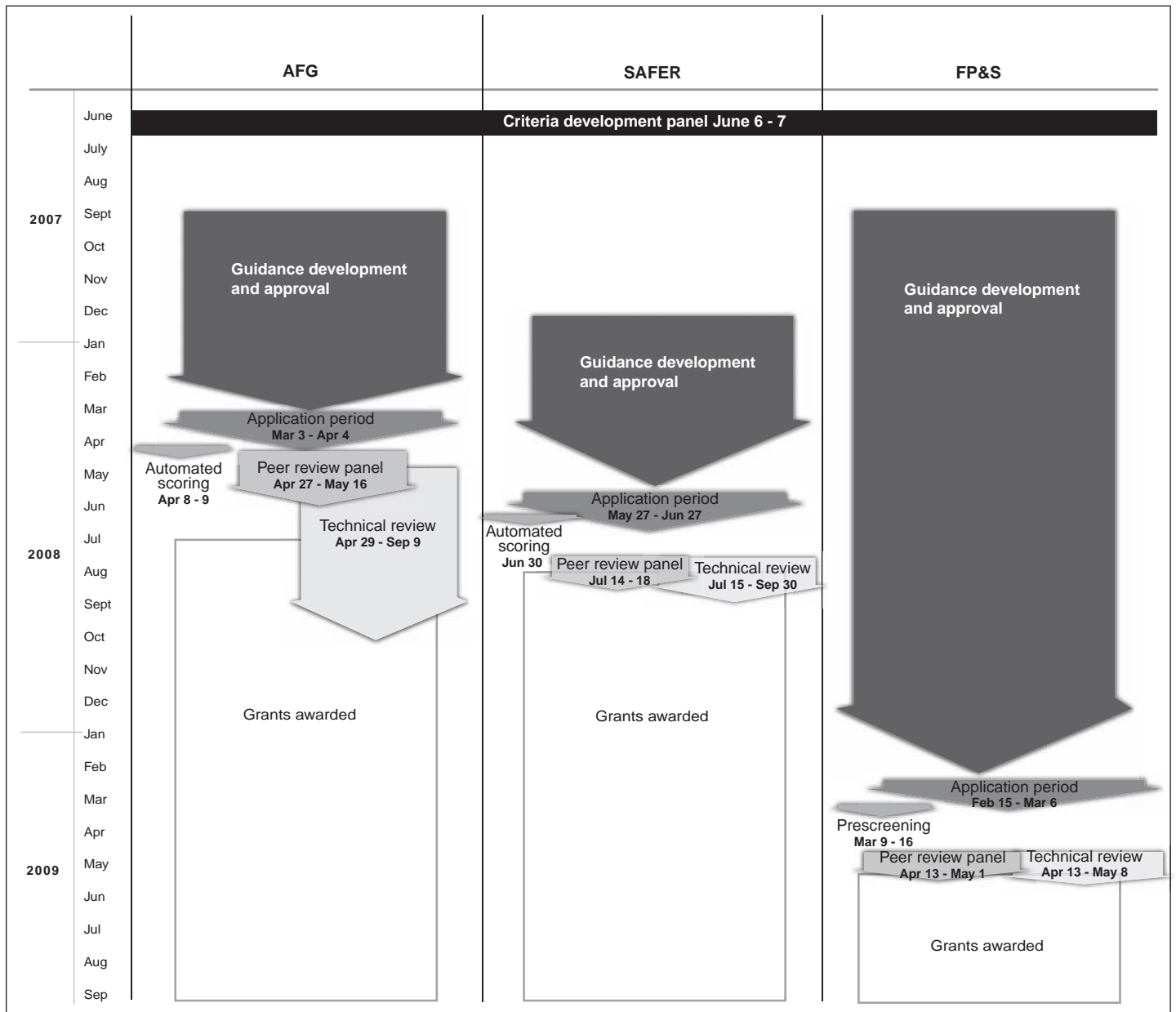
Source: GAO.

Legend: N/A = not applicable.

Appendix XII: Time Frames for the Fiscal Year 2008 Fire Grants Process

We obtained information from FEMA officials and documents in order to prepare a timeline depicting the time frames for the fiscal year 2008 fire grants process. (See fig. 8.)

Figure 8: Time Frames for Fiscal Year 2008 Fire Grants Process



Source: GAO analysis of FEMA data.

Appendix XIII: Unsuccessful AFG, SAFER, and FP&S Applicants by Department Type and Community Service Area

Tables 25 and 26 show the breakdown of unsuccessful AFG and SAFER applicants, respectively, by department type and community service area for fiscal year 2008. Table 27 shows the breakdown of unsuccessful FP&S applicants by department type and community service area for fiscal year 2007.

Table 25: Breakdown of Unsuccessful AFG Applicants by Department Type and Community Service Area for Fiscal Year 2008

	Total applicants		Unsuccessful applicants		FY08 unsuccessful applicants who have never received awards		FY08 unsuccessful applicants whose applications never made it to panel	
	Number	Percentage ^a	Number	Percentage ^a	Number	Percentage ^a	Number	Percentage ^a
Department type								
Career	1,798	12	1,169	11	390	10	255	11
Combination	3,398	22	2,361	21	716	19	438	18
Volunteer	9,256	60	6,710	61	2,373	64	1,547	65
Paid on call/stipend	1,092	7	749	7	250	7	145	6
Total	15,544		10,989		3,729		2,385	
Service area								
Urban	990	6	650	6	204	5	123	5
Suburban	2,494	16	1,726	16	543	15	322	14
Rural	12,060	78	8,613	78	2,982	80	1,940	81
Total	15,544		10,989		3,729		2,385	

Source: GAO analysis of FEMA data.

Note: Fire grants data for fiscal year 2008 funding are current as of July 2009. The fiscal year 2008 fire grants period closed on September 30, 2009, the end of fiscal year 2009.

^aSome percentages may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

**Appendix XIII: Unsuccessful AFG, SAFER,
and FP&S Applicants by Department Type and
Community Service Area**

Table 26: Breakdown of Unsuccessful SAFER Applicants by Department Type and Community Service Area for Fiscal Year 2008

	Total applicants		Unsuccessful applicants		FY08 unsuccessful applicants who have never received an award	
	Number	Percentage ^a	Number	Percentage ^a	Number	Percentage ^a
Department type						
Career	225	17	171	16	122	13
Combination	628	48	536	49	452	48
Volunteer	424	32	369	34	348	37
Interest organization	28	2	14	1	11	1
Total	1,305		1,090		933	
Service area						
Urban	152	12	115	11	89	10
Suburban	453	35	381	35	312	33
Rural	669	51	580	53	521	56
Other ^b	31	2	14	1	11	1
Total	1,305		1,090		933	

Source: GAO analysis of FEMA data.

Note: Fire grants data for fiscal year 2008 funding are current as of July 2009. The fiscal year 2008 fire grants period closed on September 30, 2009, the end of fiscal year 2009.

^aSome percentages may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

^b“Other” represents organizations without a community service area affiliation, such as private and nonprofit organizations.

**Appendix XIII: Unsuccessful AFG, SAFER,
and FP&S Applicants by Department Type and
Community Service Area**

Table 27: Breakdown of Unsuccessful FP&S Applicants by Department Type and Community Service Area for Fiscal Year 2007

	Total applicants		Unsuccessful applicants		Unsuccessful applicants who have never received an award	
	Number	Percentage ^a	Number	Percentage ^a	Number	Percentage ^a
Department type						
Career	565	22	520	23	359	19
Combination	711	28	662	29	540	28
Volunteer	708	28	674	29	623	33
Paid on call/stipend	66	3	65	3	59	3
Interest organization	473	19	388	17	320	17
Total	2,523		2,309		1,901	
Service area						
Urban	469	19	418	18	314	17
Suburban	767	30	710	31	568	30
Rural	1097	43	1032	45	908	48
Other ^b	190	8	149	6	111	6
Total	2,523		2,309		1,901	

Source: GAO analysis of FEMA data.

Note: FP&S application and award numbers are for fiscal year 2007 and reflect all fiscal year 2007 awards made through July 2008. No fiscal year 2008 FP&S grants had been awarded as of July 2009.

^aSome percentages may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

^b“Other” represents organizations without a community service area affiliation, such as private and nonprofit organizations.

Appendix XIV: Comments from the Department of Homeland Security

U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528



**Homeland
Security**

October 22, 2009

William O. Jenkins, Jr.
Director, Homeland Security and Justice
Government Accountability Office
Washington, DC 20548

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the draft report GAO-10-64 "FEMA Has Met Most Requirements for Awarding Fire Grants, but Additional Actions Would Improve Its Grant Process." The Department of Homeland Security appreciates the work in planning and conducting and issuing this report.

The following is our response to the recommendations.

Recommendation #1: To ensure compliance with all Assistance to Firefighter Grants (AFG) statutory requirements, we recommend that the Administrator of FEMA establish a procedure for tracking the percentage of grant funds awarded to fire departments for emergency medical services (EMS) purposes.

Response: Concur with this recommendation. FEMA will examine the available options and adopt one for manually and electronically monitoring the percentages to ensure compliance.

In addition, to improve the clarity, consistency, and controls of the grants review and award process, we recommend that the Administrator of FEMA take the following three actions:

Recommendation #2A: Ensure that the priorities in the grant guidance are aligned with the scoring matrix and the grant application questions, and that FEMA requests applicants to submit all statutorily required information.

Response: Concur with this recommendation. FEMA will explore options and identify means for providing clear, concise and consistent information to applicants on the funding priorities and statutorily required information.

Recommendation #2B: Coordinate with the Secretary of Homeland Security to document the review and approval process for grant guidance, develop a tracking system to monitor the progress of the review within FEMA and DHS, and set internal deadlines so that guidance can be issued in a timely manner.

Response: Concur with this recommendation. FEMA will work with applicable offices to enable a timely review and tracking of program guidance material.

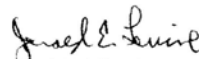
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Recommendation #2C: Inform unsuccessful applicants about the forms of assistance available to them in the future grant cycles and provide more specific feedback to applicants who are turned down for grants following the peer review.

Response: Concur with this recommendation. Additional training and outreach efforts are being developed to enhance feedback to applicants.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments to the draft report.

Sincerely,



Jerald E. Levine
Director

Departmental GAO/OIG Liaison office

Appendix XV: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contact

William Jenkins, (202) 512-8777 or jenkinswo@gao.gov

Acknowledgments

In addition to the contact named above, Leyla Kazaz, Assistant Director, and Deborah Ortega, Analyst-in-Charge, managed this assignment. Sarah Arnett, Marie Webb, and Su Jin Yon made significant contributions to the work. Christine Davis provided legal support. Stanley Kostyla and Jerome Sandau assisted with design, methodology, and data analysis, and Lara Kaskie provided assistance in report preparation.

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