


City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: MAY 6, 2009

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: JAMES K. HARTMANN, CITY MANAGER 

SUBJECT: CONSIDERATION OF A GRANT APPLICATION TO THE DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY (DHS), FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY'S (FEMA) NATIONAL ASSISTANCE TO FIREFIGHTER (AFG) GRANT PROGRAM, FOR THE PURCHASE OF A PORTABLE INCIDENT COMMAND TRAINING SIMULATION (PICTS) SYSTEM AND EXPANSION OF TECHNICAL-PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

ISSUE: Consideration of a grant application to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), National Assistance to Firefighter Grant (AFG) Program, for provision of enhanced technical and professional development training and for the purchase of a Portable Incident Command Training Simulation (PICTS) system.

RECOMMENDATION: That City Council:

- (1) Authorize the submission of the grant application (due May 20, 2009), up to \$200,000; and
- (2) Authorize the City Manager to execute the necessary documents that may be required.

BACKGROUND: On April 15, 2009, DHS/FEMA opened the application period for the 2009 AFG Program. This Program provides Federal grant funding to localities for purchase of equipment, conduct of training sessions, modification of fire stations and facilities, or purchase of firefighting vehicles.

One of the key roles for those charged with ensuring the public safety of City residents is the ability to respond to routine and major incidents efficiently and effectively. Department leadership continues to effect change management in all Department activities to enhance its emergency response capability. Change management activities to date have included, for example, clarification and definition of staff roles, responsibilities, and expectations; implementation of activity sessions in all Stations; and the development and/or revision of processes and procedures. The foundation for Department change lies in its ability to provide front-line staff high quality, challenging, and realistic and relevant technical training and professional development opportunities.

Although a mass casualty incident such as September 11, 2001 is rare, it taught the country that multi-jurisdictional and cross-departmental preparation for large scale incidents requires recurring and specialized, practical training. Closer to home, the Edsall Road fire emergency in 2007, and resultant injuries to four Alexandria fire fighters, was a wake-up call for enhanced training of our front-line staff. Effective classroom training provides the knowledge base and the theory and practice for technical issues and for professional development. Situational training provides that additional degree of hands-on realism to traditional classroom training. The Department proposes to apply for AFG funding to provide: (1) enhanced classroom technical and professional development training; and, (2) a Portable Incident Command Training Simulation (PICTS) system to complement classroom training while providing front-line staff hands-on simulation experience for emergency situations.

Training:

From an emergency response perspective, the City of Alexandria provides unique challenges: high population density, numerous historical structures, nearly 50 high rise residential and commercial buildings, new development and construction, and industrial operations. The City has experienced few major incidents in recent years; yet the potential for serious incidents is always present. Like a military operation between wars or other ventures, the Fire Department must be prepared for eventualities and for possibilities. Training is the most important daily activity for a front-line employee and his or her supervisor. And with a forthcoming Firefighter-Rescuer recruiting and training effort under development for the summer of 2009, and with older, more experienced front-line staff facing retirement, the need for enhanced training becomes more critical as each day passes. The City's and the Department's finances are not sufficient to support the levels of training needed; supplemental funds from the AFG Program are needed.

Technical training needs would include, for example, courses in modern construction and building; officer command training/strategy and tactics; training to address physical impediments during an incident such as cutting through doors, roofs, and windows; safe apparatus operation; fire suppression activities and techniques dependent upon combustion type; specialized training for marine operations, hazardous materials mitigation, and rescue team operations; and training on incidents involving electricity, natural gas, fuel spills, and the like. Professional development needs require the provision of training in writing skills; instructor training ("train the trainer"); internal and external/customer communications; ethics and integrity; diversity; leadership; employee relations; critical thinking; and performance management. The training need is significant.

Portable Incident Command Training Simulation (PICTS):

To address the needs of front-line staff for greater hands-on experience for a variety of emergency situations, an electronic Portable Incident Command Training Simulation (PICTS) system is available on the market to provide life-like training for small- and large-scale disasters that may include single-family home fires, low-rise and high-rise apartment and office building fires, hazardous material spills, mass casualty incidents, naturally occurring disasters and terrorist attacks. Like airline pilots who are provided life-like training on simulators prior to

flying large commercial planes, a PICTS system can provide real-time disaster scenarios that will enable participants to truly experience the simulated emergency, make adjustments to successes and challenges, and without any detrimental consequences to the public.

DISCUSSION: The Fire Department has identified the need to provide technical and professional development training to its front-line staff and practical incident command system training that can be opened to all disciplines including law enforcement, public works, fire, EMS, Public Health, emergency management, and senior City staff.

The Fire Department is currently providing limited classroom instruction to its front-line staff. Enhanced technical and professional development training is required. Complementing classroom training, the deployment of a PICTS system will allow for hands-on, practical experience on how to deal with a large-scale emergency. The PICTS system will also be made available to our response partners across the Northern Virginia Region to promote joint training opportunities that mirror our response plans.

FISCAL IMPACT: This grant requires a 20 percent match by the City. City staff will administer the grant. The City is also responsible for the normal administrative costs associated with this grant, including financial and reporting oversight provided by the Fire Department, as well as the Office of Management and Budget, and the Finance Department. The \$40,000 grant match will be paid out of the Fire Department's Fire Programs budget that is supported by State funds.

STAFF:

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