

Attachment A

Operational Grant Structure and Criteria Request for Wildfire Advisory Committee Review and Consideration

Operational Grants Proposal

HB 1168 provides \$1,750,000 to support small, rural fire districts with basic operations. These districts are dramatically underfunded due to low tax bases, and their preparedness suffers because of this. This grant program provides funding to support basic functions for these districts to build their capacity to be the first line of defense against wildland fires. Grants would require no match commitment from the Fire Districts, and would be awarded upon receiving Fire District acceptance signature (not as a reimbursement). The DNR is considering disbursing this funding in the following ways:

- A \$500,000 “Equipment Grant” will be made available to provide funding for the acquisition (equipment transport, personnel travel costs, etc.), conversion and/or refurbishment costs of Federal Excess Property Program (FEPP/FFP) and DNR Surplus Engine equipment.
- The remaining \$1.25 million will allocate funds for multiple project types. This grant, called “Operational Grant” for the purposes of this document, loosely mirrors the 2016 Local Fire District Wildfire Preparedness Grant (LFDWPG). Eligible project categories, taken from LFDWPG, to include:
 - Vehicles: purchase, refurbishment or conversion of vehicles NOT acquired through FEPP/FFP or DNR Surplus Engine
 - Fire equipment: non-vehicle, includes equipment suitable for wildland fire: portable pumps, slip in pump packages, water tanks (vehicle and porta tanks), chainsaws, hand tools, hose, hose fittings and related equipment.
 - Equipment replacement/upgrade: generators, pumps, reels, foam systems, etc.
 - Communications equipment: Includes the development of single or multi district communications systems, radios, vehicle, hand held, base stations, and repeater.
 - Station infrastructure/safety improvement: Improvements needed to infrastructure (helibase, water tower, etc.) and to station safety (doors, lighting, security, etc.) related to wildland firefighting.
 - Training/Other: Includes the development and implementation of programs designed for training wildland fire suppression, including instructors, facility rental, travel costs and materials. Training will be emphasized on weeknights and weekends.

The DNR respectfully requests feedback from the Wildfire Advisory Committee (WFAC) about these project categories and will consider suggestions about the inclusion of additional categories from which fire districts could benefit, such as:

- Project category to fund public education prevention and preparedness initiatives (Wildfire prevention/WRN tool kits, Firewise, 1,2,3 Notification, Fire Danger signage, HIZ assessments, prescribed fire education, etc.)
- Project category to fund capacity expansion initiatives (volunteer recruitment, Junior Firefighter programs, development of co-op engines/crews, etc.)

**Ideas for these additional categories taken from needs assessment meeting summarization, Fall 2021*

Fire District Eligibility

The DNR currently uses the following Fire District Eligibility criteria for the Volunteer Fire District Assistance Grants (Phase I and Phase II), which is largely driven by the compliance of this funding set forth by the USDA Forest Service (see ***Volunteer Fire District Assistance grants*** for a full description). These criteria intend to target those Fire Districts in the greatest need of this financial support. They are as follows:

- Respond to wildland fire on private, state, or federal lands, and
- Provide service to:
 - a rural area or a rural community with a population of 10,000 or less, or
 - a community with a population greater than 10,000 that includes service to a rural community of 10,000 or less (funding must be used to benefit the rural community)
 - grant funds must benefit the rural area or rural community

District/Department has a 70% volunteer firefighter membership or greater. As an example, for a fire district with a total of 30 firefighters (counting both paid and volunteer), 21 must be volunteers. The 2016 LFDWPG mirrored these Fire District eligibility criteria, but excluded the volunteer firefighter membership requirement and added the requirement that the Fire District have a current “Forest Land Response Agreement” in place to be eligible.

The DNR proposes to continue using the VFA grant Fire District eligibility criteria for the Operational Grant.

Operational Grant Scoring Criteria

The DNR currently uses the following scoring criteria as provided in Attachment B for VFA Phase II grants to ensure Fire Districts who exhibit the most need for assistance are prioritized. The DNR proposes to continue using the following scoring criteria with existing associated point scales for the Operational Grant:

- Required Fire District Eligibility
- Agreement Type
- Percentage of Volunteer Personnel
- Fire Operating Budget (see ***Additional Considerations***)
- FAP Core Areas and Burn Risk
- FEPP Replacement
- Average Annual Wildfire Responses

The DNR proposes to include additional grant scoring criteria, with the intent of meeting the goals set forth within the 10-Year Wildland Fire Protection Strategic Plan as follows:

- Fire District boundary proximity to community listed in Exposure Ranking (Figure 8 on page 34 of Plan)
- Fire District boundary proximity to Highly Impacted Communities

The DNR respectfully requests the WFAC's consideration of how to best incorporate these additional scoring criteria, including but not limited to: point allocation of criteria, defining boundary proximity, and point scales of the four themes and nineteen indicators as provided on the WA State Department of Health Washington Environmental Health Disparities mapping tool.

Additional Considerations

The DNR respectfully requests discussion and consideration regarding the following thoughts about both the Equipment Grant and the Operational Grant (inclusive of the \$1.75 million allocation from HB 1168 in its entirety)

- Most grant programs require some match commitment from the applicant. Generally, the applicant is to provide documentation of this match commitment fulfillment in order to be reimbursed the awarded funding amount. DNR proposes to not require a match commitment from the applicants for the following reasons:
 - Many small, rural Fire Districts have very small budgets therefore making any match commitment amount difficult if not impossible to make. It is DNR's intent to make this money fully accessible to the most in need Fire Districts.
 - The grant is structured to be awarded up front with a requirement to provide documented expenditures by grant closure date
- Discussion is requested regarding the idea of a "sliding scale" grant award limit. For example: applicant's annual wildfire suppression budget:
 - \$50,000 or less, no project request limit.
 - \$50,001-\$80,000, grant award limit is X (high)
 - \$80,001-\$150,000, grant award limit is X (med-high)
 - \$150,001-\$400,000, grant award limit is X (med-low)
 - \$400,001 or more, grant award limit is X (lowest)

Would there be value in implementing a sliding scale project request amount? Would it be more desirable to keep the annual wildfire suppression budget in the Operational Grant Scoring Criteria and not place a grant award limit on any of the applicants? Would there be more value in implementing a uniform grant award limit (such as ease of management, targeting a number of how many projects can be awarded with the full amount, etc.)?