

Virginia Fire Services Board

Administration, Policy, and Finance Committee

Wednesday, December 4, 2024

Blacksburg Fire Station #3

407 Hubbard Street, Blacksburg, Va 24060

1:30 PM

MINUTES

A regular meeting of the Administration, Policy and Finance Committee was held at Blacksburg Fire Station #3 in Blacksburg, Virginia. The meeting was called to order by VFSB Vice Chair Abbey Johnston, and a quorum was present.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT

Abbey Johnston, Committee Chair – Virginia State Firefighter’s Association
Keith Johnson – Virginia Fire Chief’s Association
Kevin Duck – Insurance Industry
Walt Bailey – Virginia Fire Service Council
Donald Hart – Virginia Association of Counties

COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT

Steven Sites – Virginia Municipal League
James Calvert – Industry (SARA Title III/OSHA)
Bettie Reeves Nobles – General Public

AGENCY MEMBERS PRESENT

Theresa Hunter, Chief Administrative Officer
Jamey Brads, Chief of Training and Operations
Spencer Willett, Government Affairs Manager

GUESTS PRESENT

Michael Yingling

CHANGES IN THE AGENDA

No changes in the agenda.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

No public comment provided.

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CONSENT AGENDA

Motion: To approve the minutes of the previous meeting (September 2024)

Motion: Bailey, **Second:** Hart

Discussion on the Motion: None

Vote: Unanimous

Action: Minutes adopted

REPORT FROM VDFP ADMINISTRATION

Theresa Hunter provided brief comments on the Administration Report, which was provided in the VFSB packet, including a report on the budget and open projects.

COMMENTS FROM THE COMMITTEE CHAIR

Abbey Johnston thanked Billy Hanks for hosting the meeting in the Christiansburg/Blacksburg area.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

No unfinished business

NEW BUSINESS

a. Mini Grants

Johnston spoke about the high number of applications and that the focus should be on personal protective equipment (PPE) and operational costs. She opened the floor to the committee to see how to proceed.

Walter Bailey discouraged the committee from making decisions during the meeting. He recommended the committee chair appoint members with VDFP staff to review and make recommendations. He also recommended that PPE be prioritized over other requests for operational expenses. He brought up issues with communications related to educating fire departments on how to apply for the grant. Also, due to the number of applications, there were some that were sent in on their own vs through the localities administration.

Keith Johnson stated that every locality is in need, but financial need is hard to assess.

Willett stated Donald Hart was on the committee and his name was not called during rollcall in error.

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Johnston spoke about four steps to determine which grants should be approved. The board should eliminate applications requesting funds for training props or projects, which are already funded in other grant areas. She then suggested scoring the applications by a work group and then examining the top 50-75% of them. The agency or board should then reach out to localities to ask if they can complete the project with only partial funding from the state. There are some localities that applied that may not be able to complete their project if they don't get the funding. That would allow to stretch out the funding a little further.

Hunter asked the committee to identify what an operational expense is. Johnston stated that operational expenses should be those used on an incident scene. Johnson stated that using adjunct instructors would be a beneficial idea. He also commended VDFP staff for their review and organization of the applications. He spoke about the provided VDFP scoring sheet and spoke about PPE funding. He mentioned that partial funding would allow everyone the opportunity to have some funding. He stated a primary set of turnout gear is more important than a second. He mentioned his FEMA review experience.

Johnston mentioned that that should be something that the workgroup can look at.

Hunter stated that the agency needed guidance on how the committee wanted to score the applications and what the priorities should be. Johnston asked if the workgroup should determine this. Hunter stated she felt the committee should determine the criteria.

The committee discussed a rating scale for PPE that takes into account sets that are out of date, nearly out of date, or a 2nd set of PPE. Johnson and Bailey spoke about PPE requests that are not structural fire gear. Jamey Brads suggested that structural PPE be reviewed first. Johnston suggested all PPE be reviewed with the same scale. She mentioned if something needs replaced or is getting ready to expire there is a greater need and should be scored differently.

Related to operational equipment, Johnston reiterated it should be used on an incident scene. She recommended a scale for operational equipment that considers items that a locality does not have, is near replacement, or is an increase in inventory. 1 being for urgent need of replacement, 2 being near replacement and 3 a need to increase inventory.

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Johnson asked if we were just talking about the scoring. Johnston mentioned that they were just discussing criteria for operational equipment. Hunter stated that the agency may have to create another document and send out to each applicant to gather more information. Johnston mentioned that applicants didn't have to disclose certain information for the operational equipment so now more information will need to be gathered. Johnson mentioned that if an agency has certain equipment already, they may not need two or three more.

Johnston asked if VDFP staff required further direction. Hunter asked how the committee should address financial need. Johnson asked what staff asked for originally. Hunter stated it was only for PPE.

Hunter stated they could use Aid to Locality (ATL) carryover data. Johnson opposed this and offered that large localities regularly carry over funds. Bailey asked how this would be quantified. Johnston concurred. She suggested putting a percentage match questions, such as 50% or 75% of a project. Bailey stated that this could be a problem for PPE. Johnston made recommendations on how to address each applicant. The question should be asked if you received partial funding, would you be able to still complete your project.

Brads stated his support of a portioned response but is predicting that most will say yes. Hunter suggested that the question needed to be asked to determine if a locality can complete the project successfully.

Johnson stated he opposed the cash match option at this point. Johnson summarized Brads' statement, and that all grantees that meet requirements receive some funds at some percentage rather than going back to localities to ask if they could receive partial funding. Hunter clarified looking at quantities.

Johnston stated that the committee should score PPE and operational categories and then take the top 75%. She recommended the committee eliminate the other column, score the PPE and operational categories using the metric discussed by the committee in a workgroup, take the top $\frac{3}{4}$ of scores, add up that dollar amount, and reduce the funding amount for each awardee to be under the total amount of funds available.

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Hunter stated that for operations that the staff would still need to reach out. Bailey stated it would be difficult because things will come up. Johnston stated that there is a need for more funding to help these localities from legislation.

Hunter went back to the matrix and wanted further clarification on scoring by the committee. Johnston asked the committee for additional criteria and brought up cutting some of the operational items, such as going from two gear washers to one. Hunter stated if 50% is taken for everything that asks that it gets the amount to around \$900,000.

Johnson stated the fund would not fund full projects. Willett mentioned that if a locality cannot meet that match or fund their project based on the amount being offered, the money just goes back into the pot for possible redistribution at a later point. Brads and Hunter spoke to the quantity of gear being requested. Bailey spoke about a request for a boat, which Brads stated might be in the bottom 25%. Hunter asked about who should be on the workgroup.

Willett asked Will Merritt, the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Officer, if including two members would violate FOIA. Merritt confirmed it would not. Johnston spoke about two committee members, two adjuncts to review and score grant applications. Brads stated yes. Hunter questioned the use of adjunct instructors. Brads stated two staff and two board members. Willett stated he recommended someone without a grant application on the committee serve on the workgroup.

Johnston asked the committee who had submitted grants, of which John Miller was the only one who had not. Willett stated Conflict of Interest (COI) only applied to financial gain. Donald Hart stated everyone is above board and he did not foresee any issues with the committee weighing in. Hart suggested those close to Richmond should be considered and Johnston deliberations could be online. Hunter agreed. Bailey stated that everyone would not score their own locality. The group would be selected soon, but not at the meeting.

Hunter and Johnston then discussed the scoring sheet. Hart questioned if Bloxom was the town or the fire department, highlighting a current issues in Accomack County. Bailey assumed that board action was needed and asked if the goal was to be ready for the February meeting. Johnston and Hunter discussed that this was feasible. Hunter stated the

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agency could get the new scoring sheet by Monday. The workgroup should be able to complete the scoring within two weeks once the information is provided.

Johnston stated this was a lot of work by staff and thanked staff for the work. Johnston asked if there was a motion needed for the workgroup. Willett stated no motion was needed.

ADJOURNMENT

Clerk of the Committee
Spencer R. Willett

Documents related to this meeting of the Virginia Fire Services Board may be requested by contacting the Government Affairs section by emailing PolicyOffice@vdfp.virginia.gov