

**Physicals, Training, PPE & Tuition Reimbursements
Membership Dues Assistance
for Volunteer Emergency Responders**

ADMINISTRATIVE GUIDE



Rhode Island Association of Fire Chiefs Foundation

2023 SAFER Grant for Recruiting
New Volunteer Emergency Responders

March 3, 2025

RIAFC SAFER Grant Program

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Introduction

The Rhode Island Association of Fire Chiefs Foundation's (RIAFC) scholarship program was developed to recruit and retain volunteers in response to a critical need identified by our Association's volunteer fire departments and emergency medical services providers. The RIAFC scholarship program is funded by a 2023 Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER) grant through the Department of Homeland Security.

This federal grant program has a **Period of Performance from 12/2/2024 - 12/1/2028**. All funds earmarked for this program shall be maintained to ensure available funding for department participants through the conclusion of the program.

Program Description

The goal of this program is to attract new Volunteer Emergency Responders to the Rhode Island fire service. RIAFC will help offset the onboarding costs of at least 25 new recruits each year throughout the four-year grant period by offering reimbursement for NFPA 1582 physicals, basic firefighter training (First Responder, EMT and Firefighter-1), and personal protective equipment (PPE).

In addition to assisting with new recruit onboarding costs, this program also offers new and existing Volunteers a Tuition Assistance benefit as well as Membership Dues Assistance for RIAFC Membership and National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC) Membership.

**NOTE: Limit of 10 reimbursements in each category per fire department. A waitlist is available for departments seeking reimbursement for 10+ new recruits.*

Physicals, Training and PPE Reimbursement

Each eligible Volunteer Emergency Responder recruited after **9/3/2024** may receive reimbursement for the following with **a two year commitment** to a recognized volunteer or combination fire department in the State of Rhode Island:

NFPA 1582 Physical: Up to **\$500** for a NFPA 1582 compliant physical with a corresponding Physician 1582 Sign-Off Form confirming a "Pass" and "Fit for Duty" status.

Firefighter Basic Training: Up to **\$2,500** for First Responder, EMT, and Firefighter-1 training expenses, including travel to attend training (i.e. mileage, lost wages, federal per diem rate for meals, and GSA rate lodging). Within the first 12 months of appointment, newly recruited volunteers must meet the minimum fire and EMS training requirements of the department, including completion of Firefighter-1. Whenever possible, departments will cover these training expenses or facilitate training in-house.

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Personal Protective Equipment (PPE): Up to **\$4,500** for a full set of structural or wildland PPE (SAFER eligible NFPA compliant turnouts) for new recruits who have successfully passed a NFPA 1582 physical and who have completed or are enrolled in Firefighter-1 level training (or departmental equivalent). One set of PPE per Volunteer. Per FEMA, the PPE must be delivered prior to submitting for reimbursement.

REMINDER: Expenses must be incurred (invoiced/paid) after the start of the Period of Performance (12/2/2024) to be eligible for reimbursement.

Tuition Assistance Benefit

Volunteers serving a recognized volunteer or combination fire department in the State of Rhode Island after 12/2/2024 (the start of the Period of Performance) are eligible to receive up to **\$5,000** for tuition reimbursement for higher education (including books, lab fees, and student fees.)

Tuition assistance is available for undergraduate and graduate studies, vocational/technical training, certification, and job training programs. Solely the Volunteer member of the department is eligible for reimbursement (not a spouse nor a dependent). Tuition will be reimbursed for coursework provided by an accredited college, trade, or technical school.

Eligibility is contingent upon the Volunteer's agreement to serve a VFD for a **minimum of two years** from their first reimbursement. Courses must be taken and passed during the grant period (12/2/2024 - 12/1/2028). Prior expenses are not eligible for reimbursement.

Benefit details:

- Applicants must be 18+ years of age.
- Must complete Firefighter-1 training within 12 months of becoming a volunteer.
- Volunteers must remain active and in good standing with their Sponsoring Department/Agency throughout the two-year period.
- Volunteers may study any subject area (not limited to firefighter training or related education) and they may attend either full-time or part-time.
- Must maintain a grade point average of at least 2.5.
- Funds cannot be used to pay back student loans.
- Career firefighters who volunteer with a VFD are eligible.
- In the case a Volunteer gets a career job during time of commitment they must still fulfill their volunteer amount of two years.
- If program eligibility is not met, the Volunteer will be required to reimburse RIAFC for any and all funds received under the tuition program.

**NOTE: Any tax implications arising from receiving these federal funds are the responsibility of the Volunteer Firefighter and not the Department. Please consult your tax preparer or the IRS for further information.*

RIAFC and/or NVFC Membership Dues Assistance

This federal grant program provides RIAFC and/or NVFC dues subsidies for departments who cannot afford to purchase membership. Membership will serve as a benefit for new and existing Volunteers.

RIAFC Membership Benefits (to learn more visit Rifirechiefs.com):

- Governmental and legislative support through lobbyist representation at the General Assembly and in Washington DC
- Access to important fire service-related monthly reports and information through representation on various boards and committees across the RI Fire Service
- Monthly networking, public relations assistance and access to RIAFC's annual vendor show
- Professional development seminars and training advocacy
- Access to up-to-date fire service information through the RIAFC "Members Area" of Rifirechiefs.com
- Automatic membership in the RIAFC Foundation, providing SAFER Grant funding for recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters, as well as being the main supporter of the RI Firefighters Memorial, and much more!

NVFC Membership Benefits (\$24 annually per individual membership):

- \$10k AD&D insurance policy and access to the [NVFC First Responder Helpline](#)
- Free online training through the [NVFC Virtual Classroom](#) and discounts to online universities and fire service trainings
- Eligibility to apply for [special members-only opportunities](#) such as gear giveaways and education scholarships
- [Volunteer Voices online forum](#), sample documents, grant-writing resources, and more!

To request assistance for membership dues, all fire departments must complete a Membership Dues Request Form which includes: Department name, address, department roster, and fire chief authorization. Send the completed request form and roster to:

aletia@volunteerfirefighter.org.

Physicals, Training and PPE Reimbursement Process

Below are the steps intended to process a Volunteer through the RIAFC SAFER program:

Step 1: The Volunteer completes the membership process with a RI volunteer/combination department.

Step 2: The Fire Chief forwards the completed “Physical & PPE Reimbursement Form” and “Training Reimbursement Form” to RIAFC’s SAFER Grant Manager once all requirements are met.

Step 3: To receive reimbursement, recipients must provide the following documentation:

- Proof the Volunteer has passed a NFPA 1582 compliant physical and is certified as “fit for duty.”
- Invoice and proof of payment for the physical (with the Volunteer’s name referenced).
- The new Volunteer must complete or be enrolled in Firefighter-1 level training (or departmental equivalent) prior to receiving reimbursement for PPE.
- Fire Chief authorization is required certifying the minimum training requirements have been met and the Volunteer is an active member in good standing.
- Invoice and proof of payment for PPE (with the Volunteer’s name referenced).

Step 4: The RIAFC SAFER Grant Manager will review all reimbursement forms as they come in, verify the documentation, and then submit the request for payment to FEMA.

Step 5: Once the funds are received from FEMA (usually 4-6 weeks after submission), then the RIAFC SAFER Grant Manager will send a check to the department.

Tuition Assistance Reimbursement Process

Both new and existing Volunteers can take advantage of RIAFC’s Tuition Assistance offering by submitting a completed “Tuition Reimbursement Form” to RIAFC’s SAFER Grant Manager with a Fire Chief’s authorization/signature.

The following documentation must be provided to qualify for tuition reimbursement:

- Provide proof of membership to a RI combination or volunteer fire department (i.e. member application indicating start date and age).
- Provide a detailed invoice showing tuition, all fees incurred and any financial aid received.
- Provide invoices and receipts for any books.
- Provide proof of payment to schools (i.e. credit card receipt, copy of the canceled check, or bank statement).
- Provide proof of classes/courses completed with passing grades (i.e. official transcript or other grade notice).

The RIAFC SAFER Grant Manager will review all Tuition Reimbursement Forms and corresponding documentation. If approved, a payment request will be sent to FEMA. Once the funds are received from FEMA (usually 4-6 weeks after submission), a check will be mailed to the department and/or Volunteer.

General Program Eligibility

The following is a list of program guidelines set forth in the SAFER grant narrative and must be adhered to by RIAFC and all participants:

1. Provide proof of membership to a RI volunteer or combination fire department or emergency services agency.
2. Newly recruited volunteers must be at least 18 years old at the time of the reimbursement request.
3. For each physical/training/PPE reimbursement request awarded, the volunteer must commit to a two year membership to a volunteer fire department.
4. For each tuition reimbursement request awarded, the volunteer must commit to a minimum of two years membership to a volunteer fire department.
5. Volunteer or paid-call firefighters who work part time for the department and are paid an average of less than 20 hours per week are eligible.
6. Volunteers who obtain a career firefighter job during the time of commitment must still fulfill their volunteer role in a department for a minimum of 12 months.
7. Volunteers must remain an active volunteer in good standing with the Sponsoring Department/Agency and respond to at least 25 percent of the department's calls or operational activities as established by the Sponsoring Department/Agency.
8. Volunteers must commit to completing Firefighter-1 within 12 months of becoming a volunteer. Rhode Island's Firefighter 1 Certification program is administered through the state.
9. The Volunteer's Chief/Commissioner/Director must sign the reimbursement forms after each stage to collect reimbursement for physical/training/PPE expenses.
10. The Volunteer must submit a reimbursement request form for all firefighter training travel expenses including expenses for mileage, lost wages, federal per diem rate for meals, and GSA rate lodging incurred during that reimbursement period. This form MUST be signed by the Chief.
11. The Volunteer's Chief/Commissioner/Director must sign the reimbursement request form after each term to collect reimbursement for higher education/tuition expenses.

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IMPORTANT: This is a reimbursement program. All major requirements must be met before reimbursement can be made. The Volunteer must provide their invoices and receipts for proper documentation of all reimbursements via federal grant funds.

The grant performance period ends 12/1/2028. All reimbursement requirements must be completed by this date and funds disbursed.

The RIAFC SAFER Committee has developed the following criteria for final award selection if needed:

1. Individual department/agency: (i.e. applications are reviewed to ensure that at least one volunteer application from each department represented in the application pool will be considered for an award).
2. Intra-department/agency: (i.e. if, based upon the application pool, funding limits require applicants from the same department to compete with each other, the volunteer with the greatest financial need (as recommended by the Fire Chief) will receive priority).
3. Inter-department/agency: (i.e. if, based upon the application pool, funding limits require applicants from one department/agency to compete with another, the department with the greatest need will receive priority).
4. Preference will be given to departments who are members of the RIAFC.
5. Preference will be given to post-9/11 Veterans in an effort to support these dedicated service members and the VOW to Hire Heroes Act of 2011.
6. Candidates will not be discriminated against based on race or gender. In order to help the Volunteer Firefighter population better reflect the gender and racial diversity of the state population as a whole, at least 30% of these awards will go to women and minorities first to fulfill the SAFER grant requirements.

**All applicable local, state or federal laws and regulations shall supersede the procedures and conditions outlined in this administrative guide. These guidelines are subject to change without notice.*

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Program Contact

For questions about eligibility, requirements or specific reimbursement forms, please email Aletia Flaherty.

Aletia Flaherty - RIAFC SAFER Grant Manager & Benefits Processor

Email: aletia@volunteerfirefighter.org

Phone: 855-VOL-FIRE

Website: Volunteerfirefighter.org

RIAFC SAFER Committee Members

Chief Scott Partington	RIAFC Foundation President
Chief Michael Gingell, Ret.	RIAFC Foundation Vice President
Crystale Perry	RIAFC Foundation Secretary
Chief Robert Bradley	RIAFC President
Chief Richard Susi, Ret.	RIAFC Executive Director
Chief William Giannini, Ret.	RIAFC Treasurer
Chief David Chartier	RIAFC Foundation Director Rep. - 2027
Chief William Bailey	RIAFC Foundation Director Rep. - 2026
Chief Michael Dexter	RIAFC Foundation Director Rep. - 2025