

**Illinois Department of Natural Resources
Division of Forest Resources
In Cooperation with the USDA Forest Service**



**Volunteer Fire Assistance Grant Program FY'2026
Open 8:00 a.m. 12/15/25**

Deadline for application submission: 8:00 a.m. CST, 2/16/26

There are now five grantee pre-award requirements statewide per the Grant Accountability and Transparency Act (GATA) [State Statute 30 ILCS 708/1](#). The five pre-award requirements all state grantees must complete are described in more detail. [Click Here](#)

Grantee Registration - [All grantees must register with the State of Illinois](#). Grantee registration is completed by accessing, completing and submitting the Grantee Registration form.

Grantee Pre-qualification - All entities must be qualified to do business with the State of Illinois. To be qualified for an FFY26 grant award, an entity must:

- Complete a GATA Profile and Current Internal Control Questionnaire (ICQ) ([GATA](#))
- must not be on the [Federal Excluded Parties List](#);
- must not be on the State of Illinois Stop Pay List;
- and be in good standing with the [Illinois Secretary of State](#).

Grantee Program Description: The Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) has been awarded federal funds from the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Services. This money is part of a national allotment for rural fire protection under the Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act of 1978, as amended by the Forest Stewardship Act of 1990. Payments pursuant to this grant are subject to the appropriation of adequate funds by the United States congress. The funds will be distributed to fire-fighting agencies as a 50/50 reimbursement type grant with a maximum award of \$10,000. **Fire Departments must have funds available for the entire project cost at the time of the application and be able to expend the entire project cost initially and then**

submit invoices and payment document to the IDNR for 50% reimbursement of the total costs.

This is the forty seventh year for the Volunteer Fire Assistance (VFA) Program. During the last grant cycle, 47 departments were awarded over 300 thousand dollars.

Grant Program Administration: The Office of Resource Conservation's, Division of Forest Resources administers the competitive program. The grant program is governed by Administrative Rule set forth in 17 ILL. Adm. Code 1570, a copy of which can be found at <https://www.dnr.illinois.gov/adrules/Documents/17-1570.pdf>, under Administrative Rules (Adopted), Forestry, Rural Community Fire Protection Program.

Eligibility Recipients: Eligible recipients are limited to the following entities:

- A single fire department serving a rural area or a rural community with a population of 10,000 or less (latest Census).
- Area fire departments (fire districts, townships, etc.) may serve an aggregate population of greater than 10,000 if the service area of the fire department includes a rural area or a rural community having a population of 10,000 or less. The VFA funding must be used to benefit the rural population.
- A single county or town with a population over 10,000 which is served by two or more fire districts operating entirely within the bounds of the county or town may qualify as long as the service area of a given fire department includes a rural area or a rural community or the population of the fire department's jurisdiction includes a rural area or a rural community or the population of the fire department's jurisdiction is 10,000 or less. The VFA funding must be used for the rural area.
- A single community with a population greater than 10,000 and having a single fire department with one or more fire stations may qualify. The fire department must have a service area that includes a rural area or community that does not exceed 10,000 in population. The VFA funding must be used only for the benefit of the rural population. Similarly, a single community with a population greater than 10,000 which also provides fire protection to an adjoining rural community of 10,000 or less population by contract may also be eligible provided the VFA funding is used entirely to support the rural community.

Application Procedures – the VFA FY26 Application (follow the link). Grant applications for funding assistance under this program shall be submitted via email to : DNR.VFA@illinois.gov.

ONLY ELECTRONIC (Email) APPLICATIONS WILL BE ACCEPTED. The application deadline is 2/16/26 at 8 a.m. Central Time. Applications received after the application deadline will be returned to the applicant and not considered by the Department.

PLEASE INCLUDE WITH YOUR APPLICATION all detailed information requested. The application is designed to allow the Department to obtain enough information to evaluate the proposed project. If you wish to print the forms and handwrite in your information that is acceptable as well. You can email scanned copies to the email noted above. Additionally, a copy

of your current Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with IDNR or a new MoU that is signed by the department. (It will be signed by the IDNR and returned to the department)

Project Evaluation and Procedures – All applications received on time and containing the information required by the application packet will be reviewed by Department staff. All complete, eligible and timely applications will be evaluated by the State Forester and Evaluation Committee. Evaluation criteria include; whether the program will improve insurance classifications; result in an organization formed under improved fire plans (the formation of fire districts or other legal entities is encouraged); encourage applicant use of all aspects of the program (training, organizing, and equipping); encourage applicant in the development of both structural and rural land fire prevention and suppression. Specific criteria used in the prioritization of projects are: degree of hazard; number of applicants involved; aspects of program used (organization, training and equipment); effect on insurance rates; compatibility with state wide rural protection plans; communications equipment; lack of tax base; written memorandum with the IDNR, Division of Forestry; definite training plans; protection of government land and facilities; protective clothing and equipment; modification of Federal Excess equipment; ground cover tools and equipment; and catastrophic loss. Each application will receive a numerical score based on the above criteria. A prioritized list will be developed using the applicants' scores.

For best results, prospective grantees should refer to Section 3 – Evaluation Criteria of the VFA Grant Program Application. Photographs and maps are always helpful.

Examples of Eligible Projects/Past funded projects:

Training: 1) Training materials, tuition, instructor fees. 2) Training classes (tuition fees, class books, classroom materials/fees)

Equipment: IDNR will cost-share on any of the following items of equipment. Equipment items not appearing on this list, but needed by a fire agency, may be eligible. **No one item may exceed \$4,999.**

Protective Clothing: Coat, pants, helmet, gloves, boots; Nomex pants and shirt (for wildlife suppression); Air Pack (complete); Air Cylinder; Pressure Demand Mask

Equipment: Skid/Slip-on pumper unit; portable tank; pump; Hoses (1" Forestry, 1 3/4" w/couplings, 2 1/2" w/couplings, 1" with couplings, hard suction with couplings, soft suction with couplings); Nozzle; Fan-Exhaust; Generator; Siren, light bar & speaker; Dry hydrant (materials & labor) on private property requires a 30 year easement to be submitted with the application.; Groundcover tools (chainsaw, backpack blower, backpack pump, fire broom, flapper, etc.)

Communication: High-Band based, installed with antenna; High-Band mobile, installed with antenna; High-Band portable; pagers

Establishment of New Fire Organizations: Expenses related to the organization of a new fire agency (legal expenses, filing fees, incorporation fees)

Examples of Ineligible Projects:

The purchase, construction or renovation of capital improvements such as fire stations or pressurized water systems; The purchase of new fire trucks, televisions, computers, or audio-visual projection equipment; Rescue, hazmat or EMS equipment.

If you have any questions or need assistance with a grant application, please email Adrian.Walker2@illinois.gov or Matthew.bernhardt@illinois.gov

Successful grantees must **sign** the standard **Illinois Grant Agreement upon execution**.

Successful grantees have **six months** from receiving a grant award letter to complete purchase and reimbursement request. (Unless other arrangements have been made with IDNR)