



MOVIN' ON UP

Kankakee County Fire Protection Districts Succeed on AGF Grant Process

In 2007, 11 departments in MABAS Division 7 applied to the Assistance to Firefighters Grant (AFG) program for a regional grant to obtain mobile data terminals (MDTs). The departments participating in the grant were Aroma, Bourbonnais, Kankakee City, Kankakee Township, Grant Park, Limestone, Manteno, Momence, Pilot Township, Otto and Salina. The goal of the program was to utilize modern technology in order to improve the efficiency, safety, and information available during fire department operations. However, approximately 1 year after submitting the application for the grant, we received the dreaded denial letter. The letter said that our application was "above average in all 4 elements" but we did not score high enough for award. While we were all disappointed in receiving the denial letter, it was decided to try again in the next grant program cycle.

The 2008 AFG program was opening in two months which gave us another opportunity to re-apply. This time, the group worked with Assistant Chief Dave Harmon of the Kankakee Fire Department who had done extensive research on MDTs and was able to provide tips and ideas to strengthen the grant's narrative. Another application was submitted to the AFG program in April 2008 requesting 31 MDTs at a cost of \$7,350 each. The departments applying would be responsible for the 20% matching portion of the total grant. Almost 9 months later,

many people involved began to expect the dreaded denial letter, however in January 2009, we received notification from the grants management staff that the funds were available for our grant but they would only approve a maximum of \$5,000 per unit. An appeal was necessary and submitted to get approval for the original amount of \$7,350 per unit. A few weeks later, we received the award notice with approval for all 31 units at \$7,350 each and a total purchase of \$227,850, \$182,280 funded by the AFG program and \$45,570 is the departments match.

There are a number of benefits to MDTs the Kankakee group found worth noting. The fire departments were looking for easier access to mapping information. While firefighters are familiar with their own district, the increased use of automatic and mutual aid has firefighters traveling outside their district more often. MDTs allow for computerized mapping which negates the need to store large volumes of map books in the apparatus. Another great feature of MDTs will be access to the dispatch centers CAD system. The MDT shows all of the dispatch notes, the address, Knox-Box locations and other pertinent information. The technology allows the fire department to send messages from dispatch to unit or unit to unit, alleviating radio traffic and a tied up system. The units can be loaded with hazmat software such as the computerized

version of the ERG, Aloha, Marplot, and CAMEO. Additionally, some departments opted to purchase mobile version of Firehouse Software which handles in-field reporting of fire and EMS runs. Departments with SCBA that have accountability systems will be able to use the MDTs to keep track of firefighters during fire ground operations.

A few lessons learned during the entire grant process... the first being to not give up after one unsuccessful attempt. Try again. In our case, just a few minor changes allowed us to go from a denial letter one year to an award the next. A second lesson learned was to have another set of eyes review the grant and offer suggestions to strengthen the narrative. Also, if you are notified by grants management offering an award at a reduced amount, attempt to appeal the reduction. It took a 2-page justification letter to restore full funding of our grant. Finally, be sure to use all resources available. Chief Hansen from Otto provided technical expertise on the proper installation of the MDTs. Chief O'Brien from Manteno and Chief Riegel from Salina assisted with reviewing the computer options and decisions to purchase the Panasonic Toughbooks. A big thank you goes to all fire chiefs and departments that were involved in the grant. Their assistance and commitment to the program will improve fire ground operations in MABAS Division 7.

About the Author:

Steven Spraker is the Fire Chief of the Kankakee Township Fire Protection District, a volunteer fire district. Additionally, he is a career Lieutenant and Paramedic for the Bourbonnais Fire Protection District where he is assigned as the red shift commander. He has been writing and securing grants for fire departments for the past 6 years. He currently holds a bachelors degree in Computer Science and a master's degree in Business Administration. He is an Illinois certified Firefighter III, Fire Officer II, Hazardous Materials Technician, Fire Investigator, Incident Safety Officer, Training Program Manager, and Instructor II. Steven Spraker has helped to secure over 2.5 million dollars in grant funding for departments in his area. He has worked with such grant programs as the Assistance to Firefighter's Grant, SAFER, Fire Prevention, USDA, and private foundations. In addition to his fire department duties, Steve currently works as a grant writer for Masimo Corporation.