

Assessment Report: Sustainability of Idaho's EMS Grant Programs for Fire Department Operations

Prepared for: Garden Valley Fire District Commissioners

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Executive Summary

This report evaluates the viability of sustaining fire department operations using Idaho's newly expanded Emergency Medical Services (EMS) grant programs. While recent initiatives reflect a commendable investment in EMS infrastructure, particularly in rural and volunteer-driven communities, current funding mechanisms are not structured to support full departmental sustainability. Strategic use of these grants can enhance recruitment, training, and public engagement, but they must be integrated into a broader funding strategy to ensure long-term operational stability.

Overview of Available Grant Programs

1. EMS Sustainability Task Force (EMSSTF) Grants

- **Purpose:** Strengthen Idaho's EMS system with emphasis on rural access, innovation, and performance-based funding.
- **Eligible Uses:** Telemedicine pilots, EMS training, community health outreach, and system performance improvements.
- **Limitations:** Does not fund core operational costs such as staffing, apparatus, fuel, or emergency response. *

*House Bill 206 allows Sustainability grants to be used for operating expenses, but no funds have been allocated or approved yet. A requirement of this bill is that the county must ensure EMS availability throughout its jurisdiction, which requires cooperation with Boise County officials. Recently, the county withdrew from the East Boise County Ambulance District (EBCAD), which established a new taxing district, indicating a move away from a county-wide initiative.

2. Idaho Fire Chiefs Association (IFCA) Firefighter License Plate (FFLP) Grants

- **Annual Allocation:** Approximately \$75,000 statewide (2025).
 - **Eligible Uses:** Fire safety education materials, CPR manikins, AV equipment for training, and public outreach.
 - **Limitations:** Restricted to educational initiatives; not applicable to general EMS service delivery or departmental operations.
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Strategic Implications for Sustainability

Strengths

- Supports **training and recruitment** efforts, especially for volunteer EMTs.
- Enables **community engagement** through public education and outreach.
- Aligns with **performance-based funding models**, potentially unlocking future resources.

Challenges

- Funding is **competitive and capped**, with limited annual availability.
 - Grants are **not designed for operational continuity**, such as payroll, equipment maintenance, or emergency response logistics.
 - Reliance on these grants alone would leave departments **financially vulnerable** and unable to meet service demands.
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Recommendations

To leverage Idaho's EMS grants effectively while maintaining operational sustainability, fire departments should:

1. **Integrate grant-funded education into recruitment pipelines** to attract and retain qualified volunteer EMTs.
 2. **Collaborate regionally** to share training resources and maximize grant impact.
 3. **Pursue diversified funding streams**, including local levies, interagency partnerships, and community health models (e.g., Community Health EMS).
 4. **Align departmental metrics with EMSSTF performance goals** to qualify for future funding expansions.
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Conclusion

Idaho's EMS grant programs offer valuable support for training and public education, particularly in rural and volunteer-based departments. However, they are not sufficient to sustain full fire department operations. Strategic integration of these grants into a broader funding framework is essential to ensure long-term service delivery, community safety, and departmental resilience.