

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Item Name: Approval of TRIF Supported Regents' Community Grant:
Research Concerning Central Arizona Fire Department
Recruitment and Retention Challenges Related to Housing**

Action Item

Requested Action: The board office asks the board to approve a TRIF supported Regents' Community Grant to research housing solutions for retention and recruitment of fire and medical first responders in the Central Arizona and Prescott regions.

Background

Arizona law established TRIF from Proposition 301 state sales tax revenue and gives ABOR the authority to administer the fund on universities' behalf. The board manages and administers the TRIF revenues through awarding and allocating revenues.

The purpose of Regents' Community Grants is to leverage university research talent to address and deliver solutions to critical issues facing Arizona communities and its citizens.

In FY 2023, the board approved and budgeted \$1 million in TRIF funding for Arizona public universities in the form of Regents' Community Grants to support academic research in areas of greatest need and interest to Arizona communities.

The board office and university personnel are working with community leaders across the state to assemble prioritized problem/opportunity statements impacting smaller communities that will serve as the basis for soliciting university research proposals.

The first Regents' Community Grant for \$800,000 was approved earlier this year for a 9-month tri-university study gathering and analyzing data regarding the retention and recruitment of Arizona's public police and fire personnel across the state.

Discussion

Opportunity Description

The Central Arizona Fire and Medical Authority (CAFMA) serves approximately 106,500 residents in the municipalities of Chino Valley, Prescott Valley, Dewey-Humboldt and unincorporated areas, such as Paulden and Williamson Valley Road. The City of

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Prescott Fire Department, which covers a population of over 45,000, and the Central Arizona Fire and Medical Authority serve over half the population of Yavapai County.

Both agencies face significant challenges in recruitment and retention, and the biggest challenge is the lack of attainable housing options. According to a report by Rounds Consulting Group, housing affordability and availability has shifted from being considered as a social, health and welfare issue into a critical economic development concern. Advances in Arizona's ability to attract high value-added businesses are at risk, primarily due to shortages in workforce supply and a lack of workforce housing. The attainable housing issue being the most important factor that adversely affects firefighter personnel (and other essential workers) recruitment and retention; however, it also affects the region's economic development potential and essential safety operations.

CAFMA currently has 23-38 operational position openings, and 10 non-operational openings. In the next 3-5 years, it's predicted there will be 25-50 new positions, plus another 15 for two new fire stations. Many applicants cannot find options to live in the region and either do not apply or leave shortly after receiving extensive specialized training at a cost of approximately \$100,000.

Research Proposal

The proposed research will use both quantitative (e.g., administrative, survey data and analysis,) and qualitative data (e.g., literature review, best practices, policy review, focus groups, interviews) to describe the challenges, and to develop a series of strategies and implementable programs for firefighters attainable housing in the region.

Guiding research questions:

1. What are the challenges in recruiting and retaining fire personnel in the region? How big are those challenges?
2. How big is the housing stock that can be used as fire personnel housing? What is the gap (in terms of both quantity and housing types)?
3. What are the causes in comparable cities and towns that successfully addressed the attainable housing problems for public sector employees? What are their proposed strategies, plans, and programs, and how do they work?
4. What is the potential of recruiting fire personnel locally? What are the options to train a fire personnel pipeline locally?
5. What resources can CAFMA tap into to address the attainable housing and workforce pipeline issues?
6. What can be added to increase fire personnel's career desirability?
7. How will the proposed options work in terms of implementation?

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The research team will engage leading stakeholders from the following organizations: CAFMA, Prescott Fire Department, Yavapai county and municipalities leaders, government organizations, regional real estate developers, legal experts, local vocational schools (e.g., Yavapai Community College), and local high schools.

Deliverables & Timeline

June 2023 - May 2024 (12 months)

Performance Period	Milestones
June 2023	Project inception
August 2023	Data collection and analysis
October 2023	Literature review
November 2023	Problem narrative
February 2024	Preliminary options
March 2024	Collaborative programming
April 2024	Options modification
May 2024	Final Report

The team plans to meet regularly (at least once per month) with the client CAFMA and Prescott Fire Department to discuss progress on the project.

Team Members

Project Faculty Lead

Nancy Baca, Director, Economic Policy Institute (EPI), The W. A. Franke College of Business, Northern Arizona University

Research Team

Feifei Zhang, Research Associate, EPI, Northern Arizona University

Shuo Liu, Research Associate, EPI, Northern Arizona University

In addition, two graduate assistants will join this project starting from the Fall 2023 semester, and work through the end of the project.

Budget Request

The proposed budget is **\$57,560** from Regents' Community Grants. The foregoing budget includes EPI personnel salary and fringe cost, graduate assistant salary, EPI team travel expenses, and office supplies, data subscription and software. NAU will provide matching funds of **\$47,060** to support this project, which includes personnel salary and fringe cost, and graduate assistant salary.

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Statutory/Policy Requirements

A.R.S. § 15-1626 “General Administrative Powers and Duties of Board”

ABOR Policy 3-412 “Administration of Technology and Research Initiative Fund”