

1.0 Introduction

The **Innovations in Fire Service Pilot Program** was launched in the spring of 2004, with the objective of providing for sustainable, widely-supported, self-financing regional services able to deliver as many supports as possible to local fire departments in the region. It was anticipated that given the opportunity and a small incentive through the Innovations in Fire Services Pilot Program, regional districts could work with the fire services to design and deliver selected fire services to fill a number of service gaps, achieve higher levels of coordination, and at the same time inform amendments to the *Fire Services Act*. To date, the grant program has modelled positive and collaborative approaches to strengthening the fire services for example by:

- Providing more efficient fire service through pooling regional resources.
- Building a more effective fire service by building local capacity, filling service gaps and providing more robust public education.
- Developing a more comprehensive understanding of issues and nature of regional fire service delivery which will result in more informed and meaningful changes to the legislation.

Continuing the funding for 2005/06 fiscal year will take advantage of the cooperative and collaborative approach that has been developed between the fire service, Ministry of Community Services, OFC and regional districts.

2.0 Innovations in Fire Services - progress in 2004/05

Under the innovations program in 2004, ten regional districts submitted “expressions of interest” in developing a regional fire service and eight regional districts were awarded \$5,000 proposal development grants. To date, five regional districts have been awarded project design grants (NORD, RDCK, EKRD, FFGRD, CSRD).

North Okanagan Regional District is implementing a governance model that will share resources between protected and currently unprotected areas in the regional district, to provide a minimum level of service to rural areas.

The Regional District of Central Kootenay (RDCK) is standardizing education among the RDCK fire departments, ensure equal access across the region district to education initiatives, and implementing a comprehensive education package that targets the needs of smaller departments. The training curriculum will be transferable to other regions.

Central Kootenay Regional District Fire Fighter Training

We currently have 18 volunteer fire departments. Until recently, training initiatives have been all over the map, some using IFSTA, some with the J.I and some working independently. Our interest has been to standardize the educational curriculum among all halls using a non-accredited curriculum put together by our education steering committee and the Justice Institute of BC. We have developed a simple, performance based education package which doesn't dwell on academics. Teaching and testing is done in the hall to ensure firefighters meet the essentials of NFPA 1001, our current Provincial standard. We are piloting this project with the J.I. Our objectives include creating a package for other areas to use as a model for this concept, hopefully ready for distribution by fall.

Our interest is to keep training simple, effective and safe. Our target is the smaller, rural VFD. While this doesn't represent a fully accredited training program recognized internationally, smaller departments don't see this as a disadvantage. We want to meet our Provincial Standard with the least pain possible for our volunteers.

Tom Brach, Central Kootenay Regional District

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Fraser Fort-George Regional District (RDFFG) is developing a plan for implementing a regional fire training center including First Nations, industry, and local government. All of these elements will provide information on the best practices for providing

preventative fire services on a regional basis.

*As a result of the Innovations in the Fire Services program, the **Regional District of East Kootenay** is seeing movement on concepts that have been discussed for years. Developing the proposal has been great for increasing collaboration and focusing the efforts of a wide range of fire departments in the East Kootenays. Partnerships are forming as a direct result of discussions around this project. For instance, the College of the Rockies is matching the OFC grant with \$25,000 in training program development and pilot projects.*

The real benefit of this project is the increased cooperation between fire departments, whether rural or municipal. Working together, we can focus on improving training for firefighters and fire prevention programs for residents of the East Kootenays. We will be looking at delivering innovative fire and rescue services to more residents. Volunteer fire departments are faced with a heavy administrative burden – this project will enhance support services and find strategies to recruit new firefighters. Over the coming year, we will strive to enact the administrative framework for sustainability and continual quality improvement.

In short, this project has been the kick-start needed to get things done that have been talked about for a long time...

Gundula Brigl, Emergency Services Coordinator

Columbia Shuswap Regional District (CSRD) is standardizing administrative procedures from fire hall inspection records to major incident reporting. Significantly CSRD also has proposed to work with the OFC to examine challenges and opportunities respecting a regional Local Assistant to the Fire Commissioner.

East Kootenay Regional District (RDEK), RDEK is implementing a plan to increase cooperation and coordination, improve training, broaden service delivery, sustainability and continual quality improvement, enhance support services and improve emergency communications.

3.0 Innovations in Fire Services – focus for 2005/06 funding

For the 2005/06 year, the focus for the Innovations in Fire Services Pilot Project will be on the coordination of regional fire and safety services, that is piloting new regionalized approaches to fire prevention. In addition, the Ministry will accept new submissions on priorities from the 2004/05 program year.

Coordination of regional fire and safety services

Under the Fire Services Act, the OFC, either directly or through a network of Local Assistants, is responsible for fire investigations, inspections and supporting the fire suppression activities of local governments, including setting standards for selection and training for fire services personnel. Presently, Local Assistants are appointed, report to and are trained directly by the OFC. The OFC, local governments and the fire services have suggested that current Local Assistant system could be improved with enhanced regional involvement.

As the key focus for 2005/06 funding, we are interested in pilot projects that would take advantage of the benefits of regional coordination of the Local Assistant system.

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Regional Districts that create a regional fire prevention manager would assume or coordinate a Local Assistant's duties such as investigation of fires, reporting of fires, and preliminary reporting of suspicious fires.

New submissions on 2004/05 priorities

In 2004/05 the Ministry received proposals from regional districts developing pilots in various services such as training, communications, and governance. We continue to be interested in advancing creative and innovative solutions to regional fire support services in these spheres. Accordingly, the Ministry will continue to be open to new ideas on the 2004/05 funding priorities.

4.0 Fire Service Program Phases to April 2006

Phase	Timeline
I. Consultation with RD's and Fire Services	Ongoing
II. Issue request for expression of interest to all Regional Districts for a pilot project	November 2005
III. Expressions of interest received	December 2005
IV. The MCS and the OFC approves \$5K submission development grant and reports out	December 2005
V. Regional Districts develop submissions	January 2006
VI. MCS and the OFC awards cost shared planning and feasibility grants (max. \$25K) to winning submissions and reports out	February 2006
VII. Feasibility studies / service plans developed	Ongoing
VIII. Implementation activities (board consideration, establishing bylaw development, etc.) begin	Ongoing
IX. Monitoring and evaluation of implementation activities for pilots	Ongoing

5.0 Submission Selection Criteria

The goal of the Innovations in Fire Services pilot program is to improve safety and property protection in British Columbia through encouraging collaborative provision of fire services. The government's approach is to stimulate creative thinking around this goal on the part of regional districts. This is why the government is prepared to share in the start-up costs of pilot projects demonstrating the effectiveness of regional fire support services. To meet the goal of improving our understanding of regional solutions, a number of criteria will be used to assess applications from regional districts wishing to undertake pilot projects.

In general, regional districts that advance proposals meeting the following criteria will stand a better chance of being selected:

- 1. Innovative and creative proposals.** The province encourages pilot projects to demonstrate unique and innovative approaches to fire service delivery. Proposals that address fire service delivery issues in new ways that are potentially transportable to other areas will be more highly rated.

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- 2. Broad based support.** Identified support from different sectors (for example fire services, municipalities, fire protection districts, and industry within a region might be actively involved in the proposal) will give proposals a higher rating.
- 3. Collaborative participation at the regional, sub-regional or multi-regional levels.** Those proposals that demonstrate wider participation in regionally supplied support programs will be rated more highly.
- 4. Range and sophistication of services being implemented,** or coordination around more complex services will lead to higher ratings.
- 5. Long term sustainability.** Pilot projects that are effectively institutionalized and that demonstrate long term financial and productive sustainability, such as being established under a regional bylaw, will be more highly rated.
- 6. Focus on coordination of regional fire and safety services** (a regional fire prevention manager model) is the key objective for 2005/06 funding.

Proposals that meet **all** of these criteria will be more highly assessed than those proposals that meet only some of these criteria.

6.0 Incentives and Supports

The Ministry is prepared to make a variety of supports and incentives available for Regional Districts interested in competing for the opportunity to implement a fire support service pilot project:

Supports

- Consultant Assistance – the Ministry will continue to retain a consultant to be available to regional districts participating in the pilot program. The consultant might provide technical expertise and advice on the design, development and implementation of the fire service plans.
- In-kind Support – on request, Office of the Fire Commissioner and Local Government Department staff will provide support on fire services submissions, planning and implementation.

Incentives

- Submission development grant – **\$5,000**. This funding would be available to proponents to be used for costs attributable to development of pilot project submissions.
- Support for detailed service feasibility and planning – cost shared 50:50 to a maximum **total shareable project cost of \$50,000**. Funding could be payable on completion for non-routine expenses* incurred in developing and gaining consensus over a service plan for the region or sub-region.

**Non-routine expenses are extraordinary services or activities directly related to the submission and do not include things such as, permanent staff salaries and other employee benefits, regular overhead or administrative costs.*

As a rough guide, the Ministry expects to allocate $\pm 25\%$ of available funds toward submission development grants. The $\pm 75\%$ remaining will be allocated toward support for feasibility and service planning activities associated with selected pilots. If all RD's claim the maximum provincial grant, funding will be available for approximately six pilot

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projects in 2005/06, split between the two intakes. If the average feasibility study grant is significantly less than the maximum, it may be possible to fund additional pilots.

7.0 Implementation Stage Supports

In the first year of innovations in fire services pilot funding 5 regional districts were awarded (\$25,000) cost shared project design grants. We expect that some regional districts may require additional supports as their regional fire support services are implemented. The MCS and the OFC will cost share with regional districts extraordinary, one-time implementation costs. For example supports may be required to draft establishing bylaws for a regional service or cost sharing might be necessary over a limited period to achieve phased self-sufficiency. Up to \$15,000 cost shared is available by providing a detailed written request to the OFC.

8.0 Harvesting the Learning

To make the best use of the experimental approach being advanced through the Innovations in fire services pilot project, we must collect and analyze the information being gathered from the pilots. To date, the MCS has taken some steps to gather information resulting from the pilot projects including:

- Requesting a written report back to the Ministry describing the experience of the regional district that would provide commentary on obstacles, barriers and successes as the project was implemented, as well as products such as training materials developed as a result of the innovations in fire services pilot program.
- Collecting baseline data on the current status of regional fire service delivery in BC including those regional districts currently awarded innovations grants.

While these efforts will provide regional districts, the OFC and the Ministry a general understanding of what is and isn't working, we need a detailed description of project successes and obstacles respecting regional fire service delivery. We would like encourage regional districts to complete their own evaluations of the pilot projects. To this end the Ministry will provide a grant of \$7500 to share the cost of completing pilot project evaluations. In many cases we expect that a third party consultant would be retained to conduct the evaluations and that a copy of the final results, reports and documentation of the evaluation would be provided to the Ministry and could be shared to all regional districts. This funding can be accessed on an ongoing basis by written request to the Ministry.

Contact us:

Please address any questions and/or expressions of interest by December 16, 2005 to the Innovations in Fire Services Pilot Project, Office of the Fire Commissioner, PO Box 9491 Stn Prov Govt, Victoria BC V8W 9N7 or OFC@gov.bc.ca.