

Relief Application Guidance Document

This document is provided to offer general guidelines for providing financial relief to those in need.

- If an applicant requires financial relief assistance, he or she must complete a Local Relief Application (form # 101) first. The applicant should be assisted in completing the Local Relief Application by the Trustees from his or her local association.
 - Blank copies of the Local Relief Application may be obtained from the Local Relief Association Secretary, from the State Association office, from the State Association website under the forms section, or by contacting the Executive Committee member for the applicant's respective county.
- Who is eligible to apply for relief?
 - Primarily, any member of a Local Relief Association.
 - Under special/rare circumstances, their spouse or dependents are eligible to apply directly for relief.
 - Once a member becomes a qualified member (completion of 84 qualified months of service) that member is entitled to lifetime benefits regardless of their continued membership in a fire company but can only apply to the Local Relief Association where the membership line number resides.
 - When a "Qualified" member passes away, that member's spouse is also entitled to relief benefits until the spouse dies or remarries.
 - Dependent children are also entitled to relief up to the age that they cease being a dependent. A special needs child that remains a dependent of the member would be entitled to the balance of their natural life. Documentation must be provided substantiating a special needs classification for a dependent.
- The relief application must be completed in its entirety to be considered.
 - This includes identifying all income for the applicant and their spouse, any disability or unemployment compensation, rental income, royalties, social security, or any other income.
 - In joint living arrangements this can present difficulty. While not legally married, a couple may be sharing expenses. In these cases, it is prudent to identify the total household income when deciding of the need for relief.
 - The Trustees should require the applicant to provide copies of pay stubs and may also request income statements and complete tax returns to substantiate a request for relief.
 - The applicant must also document their monthly living expenses.
 - Any monthly expense listed should have a copy of a bill attached verifying the amounts listed.
 - Credit card statements should be examined to break out eligible and ineligible expenses. Credit card statements should also be examined to determine if listed charges have already been reported as expenses on the application. Only eligible unduplicated expenses may be considered for payment. This amount should be reflected in the application.
 - Efforts should be made to create a payment program or workout agreement. The applicant should be encouraged to seek credit counseling particularly where their debt load is high and difficult to manage.
 - If the applicant is requesting relief due to medical expenses the applicant must provide original copies of all invoices and an explanation of benefits received from any medical insurance provider reflecting what has been paid and what is still due and owing. The unreimbursed amount would be considered an eligible medical expense.

- Relief funds are not intended to automatically reimburse co-pays or deductibles for medical expenses. They may be calculated in the overall expenses, but expenses must exceed income. One-time large expenses should be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.
- Where there is a large or extraordinary medical expense, identify what steps have been taken to establish a payment program or workout agreement with a provider.
- If the applicant is requesting relief due to the loss of income for any reason, the applicant needs to document what their income was and what income was lost plus expenses for the period. The applicant must also show what income they have now.
- The applicant should also be prepared to explain steps taken to reduce expenses during the period of income loss. Examples would include using available funds including emergency savings prior to requesting relief, reducing utility expenses to the extent possible, reducing recreational expenses, etc.
- The statement of need should be as complete and detailed as necessary to allow the reader to understand the circumstances surrounding the request for relief. If necessary, the statement of need may be typed on a separate page that would then be attached to the relief application.
- Every relief application must be signed by the applicant, the trustees, and the officers where appropriate.
- Relief applications should be treated as confidential documents and should not be discussed in public venues.
- **ALL RELIEF APPLICATIONS MUST HAVE PROPER SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION.**
 - The Trustees that review the application are responsible to ensure that this supporting documentation is made part of the relief application package.
 - All documentation should be originals that may be examined and photocopied, and the original bills should then be returned to the applicant. Photocopies made by the trustees should be kept as a part of the relief application package.
- In most cases, an applicant's expenses should exceed their income when examining their monthly income and expenses.
 - The applicant must have a financial need to request financial assistance. There may be one or several circumstances that create this financial need.
 - One could be medical bills that create a hardship that the member is not able to meet.
 - Another could be the loss of income that results from being out of work due to illness, injury, or loss of a job or employment (layoffs, plant closing, job elimination, etc.).
 - A one-time event that creates a financial hardship such as a catastrophic event may also be considered. Examples are a fire, a flood, or other extreme calamity.
- The key is there must be need and that need must be documented. Relief is not automatic and is not guaranteed. Every application is to be judged on its own merits. You should also recognize that not all family structures are the same. The traditional nuclear family now comprises less than 50% of all families. We have domestic partnerships, alternative living arrangements, more adult children living with their parents and their own children, unmarried coupling in shared living arrangements, etc. In short, each local association knows their own membership better than anyone else.
- An applicant is expected to use the resources that he or she has readily available to meet their needs when applicable. This could include an applicant's regular checking account, emergency funds, and cash on hand within reason. Relief funds would be for expenses that exceed those resources.
 - An applicant is not expected to go further into debt before applying for and receiving relief funds. Obtaining loans and remortgaging a home is a time-consuming process at a time when the applicant may not have time to obtain such funds. Further, banks and other lending institutions often use the ability to pay when evaluating a loan option. An applicant in financial distress may not even qualify for a loan so it is unreasonable to expect them to go through this process.
 - Additionally, an applicant is not expected to liquidate their retirement accounts or funds to obtain relief. Doing so often results in a financial penalty that we do not want our members to incur.

Recurrent Applications for Relief

- There may be some cases where an individual files an application for relief on an ongoing basis from one year to the next.
- There may be occasions where relief is warranted based on an individual's circumstances.
 - An example may be a widow or widower living on a fixed income with limited assets.
- Conversely, a Local Relief Association may receive applications on a recurring basis because the applicant has taken no action to improve their own situation. The fact is that every application for relief should be judged on its own merits and not all applications warrant approval.
- As part of reviewing an application for relief the Trustees should consider whether it is appropriate to make recommendations to the applicant to make changes to their lifestyle.
 - Other actions that the trustees may suggest if the applicant's situation shows no signs of improving over the long term include seeking financial counseling, downsizing their homes, or even filing for bankruptcy.
 - If the member is claiming a disability, ascertain if the member has filed with the Social Security Administration for disability.

Items that may not be considered or paid for using relief funds.

- Recreational expenses – this includes vacations, recreational travel, tickets for sporting events, concerts and related type activities, rental vehicles. This also includes club memberships and associated fees, boat slip fees.
- Payments for pets including grooming, boarding, veterinarian fees, or food for animals. This also includes animal care such as padding for horses and farm operations.
 - Note: Service animals such as a Seeing Eye dog may be considered based on financial need and constraints.
- IRS and/or Income taxes and penalties, self-employment taxes, or excise taxes.
- Restitution arising from any civil or criminal proceeding including court ordered payment, arbitration, or settlement conferences.
 - This is not to be confused with child support and in particular payment of medical expenses, food, or necessary expenses for the welfare of dependents.
- Meals at restaurants.
- Designer apparel includes wearing apparel, accessories, and eyeglasses.
- Elective or cosmetic surgery.
- Flowers for funerals, wakes, hospital stays, well wishes, or other related type intentions.
- Attorney's fees.
- Union dues or association dues.
- Private school tuition.
- Expenses/maintenance fees related to second homes, vacation homes, and timeshare properties.
- Luxury items such as boats, airplanes, etc.

Individuals that are Medicaid recipients are not eligible for relief payments due to US Government rules covering Medicaid.