**Summary of 9-1-1 Grant Process Improvements and Recommendations**

**Based on the March 13-14, 2019 Advisory Council Meeting**

**For the 9-1-1 Grant Program Subcommittee**

* Next year it should be clarified that individual applications are required for each different project. No combination applications will be accepted.
* Applicants will be required to provide detailed cost estimates or documentation to justify funding requests.
* PSAPs should be asked for information on how much money is in their 9-1-1 local fund.
* Does the Council want to look at the financial need of applicants?
* Does the Council want to limit the number of applications that one entity can submit?
* If applicants submit more than one application, they will be asked to rank order their priorities.
* How critical is the requested item/service to the operation of a 9-1-1 system?
* Are other funding sources available for such a project?
* Next year the Council might want to consider the current age of equipment to determine if an equipment replacement request is too premature. For example, the standard replacement cycle for computers at the State of Montana is 5 years, while one of the applications requested replacement of 3-year old computers.
* It might also be important to make sure an applicant can sustain or provide upkeep for an expenditure or afford its replacement later.
* The Council can more clearly outline the definition of a 9‑1-1 system and can provide specific examples (hardware, software, data).
* The Council can decide not to give any one entity more than $500,000. It can cap allotments if this is stated ahead of time.
* The Council may want to consider putting a limit on how much time it may take a project to be implemented.
* Before the next grant cycle, the Council must clarify how many years an application can cover.
* The Council will need to make sure that projects do not extend beyond seven years.
* The Council should ensure that every county receives its number one priority.
* Does the Council want to achieve geographical dispersion of grant funds as a goal?
* Next year it will not be sufficient to have a single generic provider letter of support for all of a local/tribal government’s requests. A provider’s letter should address why the provider supports each individual project.
* When scoring criteria is changed for the next grant cycle, the Council will have to adopt new rules. At the next meeting in July, new rules will need to be proposed. A special meeting prior to then may be needed so as to be able to pass the new rules and have them go into effect before September. This will be an aggressive schedule because there are requirements in law that have to be met, such as the public comment period and response periods, etc.
* The Council needs to try to avoid funding ongoing operational and maintenance costs with grant money. Local/tribal governments should be encouraged to apply for one-time expenditures. How would this requirement affect wireless providers?
* Is the purpose of the grant program moving forward going to relate to implementing the Statewide 9-1-1 Plan and achieving NG9-1-1?
* The Council could adopt a preference in its policies and inform applicants ahead of time that there will be a preference for projects included in the Statewide 9-1-1 Plan. This preference can be put in the rules, but it doesn’t have to be.
* Once the statewide 9-1-1 Plan is complete, the Council will have access to 50 PSAP assessments. These will allow the Council to see what each PSAP needs to do to get to a base level before even considering NG9-1-1. The Council will be able to communicate with that PSAP and say we really need you to upgrade your equipment to get to this certain level. We have grant funding available, but you have to apply.
  + Some local governments may not have applied this year because they don’t have the skills or personnel to do a good job writing grants or they might not have the capacity to manage a grant after it is awarded. We may need to provide assistance to help them get applications submitted.

**Grant Considerations for Wireless Providers**

* It should be noted that both PSAPs and providers are covered under the same list of allowable costs in law.
* In the future, the telecoms need to provide better cost estimates, just like all the applicants.
* The provider applications funded in this grant cycle consisted primarily of cost recovery requests for operational costs. Should this continue? The wireless cost recovery program was discontinued under HB61.
* Should the grant program continue to fund wireless provider cost recovery? If so, should this funding initiative be separated from 9-1-1 grant funding?
* The 9-1-1 Grant Program rules allow for grants to pay for “facilities.” Under the wireless cost recovery program, telecommunications companies could not seek reimbursement for towers. Presumably, they would under the new rules. The Advisory Council should address this.
* The Plan needs to outline good provider investments because simply increasing wireless coverage really isn’t an investment in NG9-1-1.
* How can the Council ensure that providers are included in the Statewide 9-1-1 Plan, so their investments become part of the process of moving towards NG9-1-1?
* If the purpose of the grant program moving forward is going to relate to implementing the Statewide 9-1-1 Plan and achieving NG9-1-1, then the Council needs to include these types of investment for providers and PSAPs.