

Fire Department Incentive Program

Background

Over the last five years, the City of San Luis Fire Department has experienced severe levels of attrition within its ranks. This has been due to terminations (*both voluntary and involuntary*) and transfers to other agencies. The ability to recruit, hire and retain Fire Fighters has been a difficult and troubling task. These staffing shortages abound in virtually every industry amid the “Great Resignation,” and without proper staffing levels, the critical services provided by the San Luis Fire Department become unsafe or impossible to perform.

Need for Fire Fighters

The San Luis Fire Department is in dire need of Fire Fighters, preferably those who are Certified Emergency Paramedics (CEP’s) with Firefighter I and II Certifications. This is based on several facets:

- 1) The hiring process for Fire Fighters takes place over a time-period of 3 months to accommodate all phases of testing and hiring. The hiring process includes physical agility, written testing, interviews, background investigation, as well as physical and drug screening processes.
- 2) Individuals who do not have their EMT certification and/or firefighting experience at other agencies must attend an Academy in the State of Arizona. The academy is a 1-year (2 college semester’s) training academy followed by a 3 month in-house “on-the-job” field training program. Therefore, it takes a non-EMT certified individuals over a year before they are hired and fully trained to work as a Fire Fighter.
- 3) Certified EMTs and/or employees with firefighting experience only undergo a 3 month in-house “on-the-job” field training program, which can be shortened based upon their experience and aptitude. Therefore, it takes a certified EMT 3 months to be fully trained to work as a Fire Fighter.
- 4) Certified applicants and Fire Fighters who have previously worked in the firefighting industry bring certification and experience with them. Experience is crucial in a profession that consistently requires officers to make critical decisions, some of them being a matter of life and death, in a very short time frame.
- 5) Hiring non-certified applicants requires the City of San Luis to send those employees to a firefighting academy. The city currently pays \$2,500.00 for academy fees per employee.

PROPOSAL

Currently, staffing within the San Luis Fire Department is at a critical stage. A new and unique manner of bringing experienced employees is needed to help solve this complex issue. The implementation of an Incentive Program will help attract applicants for the position of Firefighter, which is one of the most difficult-to-fill positions in the City of San Luis.

Incentives paid from Proposition 207 Funding

The City of San Luis currently receives funding from *Proposition 207 (Smart and Safe Arizona Fund)* to be utilized for Public Safety personnel costs. The *Retention* and *Hiring* Incentives will be paid from this funding and such incentives will remain available to employees contingent upon availability of this funding.

- **Retention Incentive:**

A retention incentive may be provided to an employee for staying with the City of San Luis Fire Department and who is in a position in a classification that is critical to the ongoing operations of the department, or is in short supply in the labor market, and/or is a difficult to recruit for classification. The requirements for the retention incentive must be in writing. The minimum time period that an employee must commit to stay with the City in order to receive a retention incentive is twelve (12) months.

- *To be eligible for the retention incentive, the employee must:*

- Have successfully completed twelve months of employment and passed the probationary period;
- Have no disciplinary actions within the last six (6) months preceding effective date of incentives; and
- Have a Performance Evaluation rating of three (3) Competent or above.

- ***Incentive Amounts:***

- Certified Emergency Paramedics (CEPs) – up to \$2,500
- Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs) – up to \$500

- **Hiring Incentive:**

A hiring incentive may be offered to a candidate as an inducement to commit to employment with the City of San Luis. This incentive will be provided for positions that are short in supply in the labor market and are difficult to recruit for.

- *To be eligible, the applicant must:*

- Has an Emergency Medical Technician Certification/Certified Emergency Paramedic and Firefighter Certification I and II;
- Has an Emergency Medical Technician Certification or Certified Emergency Paramedic; or
- Is enrolled and attending an approved firefighting academy.

Incentives paid from the General Fund

The following incentives will be paid from the General Fund.

- **Educational Incentive:**

- Associate Degree **\$50** per month
- Bachelor's Degree **\$75** per month
- Master's Degree **\$100** per month

- **Special Assignment Incentive**

This incentive is provided for employees working on a special assignment, which is designated on an as needed basis by the Chief at his or her sole discretion. An official "*special assignment*" is a full-time assignment, within the department, normally tasked with performing "acting" duties in the absence of an employee of higher rank. Only Fire Fighters who have successfully completed their probationary period may be assigned to perform a special assignment. This incentive will be provided only during the period employee is assigned to perform designated special assignment duties.

Categories:

- a. Acting Engineer \$2 / per hour
- b. Acting Captain \$2 / per hour
- c. Acting Battalion Chief \$2 / per hour

- **Critical Skills Incentive:**

A Critical Skills Incentive may be provided to an employee who possesses and uses specialized skills that are necessary and critical to the ongoing operations of the San Luis Fire Department. The employee must be actively using these specialized skills to receive the incentive. Firefighters can work in any area or division and agree to take on extra work or duties that require these specialized skills. Duties requiring critical skills are secondary in nature to the officer's primary assignment and are voluntary in nature. Officers can be eligible for two critical skills assignments simultaneously.

- a. Paramedic \$2.15 / hour
- b. Hazmat \$.50 / hour

The Incentive program is not considered a "bonus". Incentives are predetermined in an employment contract and have specific requirements to be met in order to receive payments. Bonuses reward extra compensation for work the employee was already expected to perform.

Below is a list of other agencies within the state that have implemented similar programs:

- Rural Metro Fire - \$10,000 Sign-on Bonus with a 2-year commitment.
- City of Phoenix - \$7,500 for National Registry or Arizona State Certified Paramedics

CONCLUSION

The implementation of this incentive program is needed to help address growing issues with the hiring and retention of firefighters. This is a nationwide issue, not just in the City of San Luis. Providing additional compensation incentives will help attract experienced firefighters to the City of San Luis. In addition, this program would comply with all legal requirements regarding additional compensation of government employees. It is anticipated that the San Luis Fire Department will be able to attract talented and experienced officers and bring the agency back to full staff in a shorter amount of time.

GUIDELINE:

This guideline will detail the incentive program that is available to the City of San Luis Fire Department (SLFD) Fire Fighter new hires. All incentives outlined in this program are **subject to budget availability**.

- I. **Retention Incentive:** Up to **\$2,500** retention incentive will be provided to current Fire Personnel beginning after successfully completing twelve months of employment and passing probation and every six months thereafter, *while Proposition 207 funding is available*.

To be eligible for the retention incentive, the employee must:

- Have completed a minimum of twelve (12) months of employment and successfully completed probation; and
- Have no disciplinary actions within the last six (6) months preceding effective date of incentives; and
- Have a Performance Evaluation rating of three (3) Competent or above.

Incentive Amounts:

- Certified Emergency Paramedics (CEPs) – up to \$2,500
- Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs) – up to \$500

II. **Hiring Incentive**

- **Non-Certified:** Up to **\$1,000** sign-on incentive will be provided to Firefighters (*Non-Certified*) new hires *while Proposition 207 funding is available*.

To be eligible for this incentive, an employee:

- Must have completed a minimum of twelve (12) months of employment and successfully completed probation.
- *Any Officer Recruit who returns to SLFD under reinstatement is not eligible for this incentive.*

- **Certified Fire Fighter I & II Paramedics:** Up to **\$10,000** sign-on incentive will be provided to Fire Fighter Paramedic (*Certified*) new hires with a 2-year commitment *while Proposition 207 funding is available*. *Any Officer Recruit who returns to SLFD under reinstatement is not eligible for this incentive.*

To be eligible for this incentive, an employee must:

- possess a Paramedic Certification;
- have completed a minimum of twelve (12) months of employment and successfully completed probation; and
- signed a 2-year commitment employment contract with SLFD.

Incentive will be paid as follows:

- first payment of \$5,000 will be paid upon successful completed of new hire probationary period.
- Incentives of \$2,500 will be paid every six months thereafter.

It is recommended that the Hiring Incentive payment to an applicant be made only as a condition of an employment contract entered between the City of San Luis and the Certified/Non-Certified applicant. If the contract specifically stipulates the requirements of the applicant and all those requirements are achieved, then the applicant has fulfilled the obligations of the contract and are entitled to the contractual compensation listed, and no more.

III. Educational Incentive:

This incentive rewards employees who take the initiative to increase their job worth by gaining job-related knowledge, behaviors, and personal and professional skills to significantly enhance their value to their department and the City.

To be eligible, employees must:

- provide Human Resources with a copy of their Degree.

Incentive will be paid as follows:

- Associate Degree **\$50** per month
- Bachelor's Degree **\$75** per month
- Master's Degree **\$100** per month

IV. Special Assignment Incentive:

This incentive is provided for employees working on a special assignment, which is designated on an as needed basis by the Chief at his or her sole discretion. An official "*special assignment*" is a full-time assignment, within the department, normally tasked with supporting other divisions of the department. This incentive will be provided only during the period officer is assigned to perform designated special assignment duties.

Categories:

- Acting Engineer **\$2.00** / per hour
- Acting Captain **\$2.00** / per hour
- Acting Battalion Chief **\$2.00** / per hour

To be eligible, employee must:

- have successfully completed their probationary period;
- hold the rank of police officer, corporal or sergeant; and
- be designated by the Chief at his or her sole discretion to a special assignment.

V. Critical Skills Incentive:

A Critical Skills Incentive may be provided to an employee who possesses and uses specialized skills that are necessary and critical to the ongoing operations of the Fire Department. Fire Fighters can work in any area or division and agree to take on extra work or duties that require these specialized skills. Duties requiring critical skills are secondary in nature to the officer's primary assignment and are voluntary in nature. Fire Fighters can be eligible for two critical skills assignments simultaneously.

- Paramedic **\$2.15 / hour**
- Hazmat **\$.50 / hour**

To be eligible, employee must:

- possess Certification for critical skill; and
- must be actively using these specialized skills to receive the incentive.