

Fire Service Training – Local Assistance

Wisconsin Technical College System: 2009-11 Biennial Budget Initiative
September 2008

ISSUE

The WTCS Local Assistance appropriation, which has not been increased since FY 2003-04, is insufficiently funded because of increasing tuition, costs of instruction, and training demand.

BACKGROUND

WTCS districts are responsible for providing fire service training free of charge to volunteer and paid fire departments maintained by Wisconsin cities, villages, and towns. In addition, the WTCS State Agency is responsible for establishing and supervising training programs in fire prevention and protection and for providing certification opportunities for firefighters who complete these programs.

To fund its fire prevention and protection program, including the reimbursement of WTCS districts' firefighter training costs, the State Agency receives a portion of 2% of the premiums paid to the state fire fund for the insurance of any non-state public property. The Department of Commerce retains a portion of the "2% funds" to support its fire safety programs and to administer the fund. The remainder is distributed among local volunteer and professional fire departments that satisfy statutory eligibility requirements.

WTCS 2% funds are divided into two annual program revenue (PR) appropriations: state operations and local assistance. State operations funds are used to support four State Agency fire protection positions, curriculum development, testing materials, grading written exams, and on-site oversight of practical skills tests. Local assistance funds are used to reimburse WTCS districts for the tuition and material costs of providing training courses to state firefighters. Unspent funds are returned to the state 2% fund at the end of each fiscal year for redistribution to local fire departments.

In response to increased costs and demand for firefighter training, the 2003-05 state biennial budget increased the annual funding for WTCS local assistance by \$100,000, to \$600,000 annually. This is the only change in local assistance funding since 1997.

Per-credit tuition for Fire Service Training increased from \$70 in FY 2003-04 to approximately \$97 in FY 2008-09, or by 38.6%. Tuition revenue currently accounts for approximately 19.7% of total costs of delivering these programs. In contrast, local property tax revenues fund approximately 67% of program costs. To hold WTCS districts harmless for tuition increases since 2003-04, the Local Assistance appropriation would have to be increased by \$231,600 annually, to a total of \$831,600.

WTCS districts' per-FTE costs of instruction have increased 5% over the past two fiscal years alone. In addition, an identified need to expand Fire Fighter II training to include tactical rescue and vehicle extrication will cost an estimated \$20,000 annually. Static local assistance dollars available to reimburse increasing tuition remission costs results in a greater proportion of fire training costs borne by local taxpayers and reduces WTCS districts' capacity to provide needed training. To hold WTCS districts harmless for tuition increases and increased instructional costs, the Local Assistance appropriation would have to be increased by \$281,600 annually, to a total of \$881,600.

At the same time demand for, and provision of, technical college training services is on the rise; the WTCS' share of available funds has declined. The proportion of 2% funding provided for direct training should reflect the need for and priority given to professional development within Wisconsin's fire service. As shown in Table 1, the total amount of 2% funds appropriated increased from \$10.2 million in 2003-04 to \$16.6 million in 2008-09 or 62.1%. In contrast, the WTCS Local Assistance appropriation has remained constant at \$600,000. As a result, the proportion of all 2% funds appropriated for WTCS Local Assistance decreased from 5.9% in FY 2003-04 to 3.6% in FY 2008-09. To achieve a proportion of 5.9% for Local Assistance in FY 2008-09, the amount appropriated for Local Assistance would need to total \$980,000.

Table 1

	FY 2003-04	FY 2008-09
WTCS Local Assistance	\$ 600,000	\$ 600,000
Total 2% Funds	10,248,700	16,610,100
Percentage Local Assistance	5.9%	3.6%

REQUEST

Provide an additional \$150,000 PR in FY 2009-10 and an additional \$231,600 PR in FY 2010-11 from the 2% fund for WTCS Local Assistance to fund fire protection and prevention training programs. The Wisconsin Fire Service Joint Advisory Committee on Fire Service Training, with the exception of the Wisconsin Fire Chiefs Association, supports requesting additional funds for this purpose. The Joint Advisory Committee includes representatives of the Wisconsin Fire Chiefs Association, the Professional Firefighters Association (AFL-CIO affiliated), the Wisconsin State Firefighters Association, the Fire Inspectors Association, the Fire Training Officers Association, the state military, and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. These funds will enable the WTCS to fulfill its statutory responsibility to provide high quality, accessible training to Wisconsin's volunteer and paid fire departments.

	2008-09 Base Year Funding	2009-10 Request	2010-11 Request	Biennial Increase over Base
	\$600,000	\$750,000	\$831,600	N/A
Increase/Base	N/A	\$150,000	\$231,600	\$381,600