

Application Score Sheet

Proposed Project: Franklin County Board of County Commissioners, First Responder Communication System (#333)

Proposed Project/Program County: Franklin County

Board of County Commission Support: Yes

Rural County: Yes

Opportunity Zone:

Total Projected Project Cost: \$775,000

Match Provided: \$25,000

Triumph Funds Requested: up to \$750,000

Triumph Funds Recommended by Staff: up to \$750,000

Score:

ROI:

Economic Analysis, Impact and Score

Franklin County is seeking up to \$750,000 in Triumph Gulf Coast funding to contract with a consultant to advise the county on the purchase of a new First Responder Communication System (the “system”) for use by the Franklin County EMS and Fire, Franklin County Sheriff's Office, Franklin County Road Department, Franklin County School District, Weems Hospital, Carrabelle Police Department, and the City of Apalachicola Police Department. The requested funds will be used for the first phase of a two-phase project. Phase 1 is the procurement and hiring of a communications consultant for up to \$775,000. It is likely that a Phase II will follow, for purchase and installation of the system and staff training, with \$1,500,000 in legislative funding, and county funded system maintenance expenditures as match. However, the current request is limited to Phase I.

Pursuant to s. 288.8017(d), F.S, “Grants to local governments in the disproportionately affected counties to establish and maintain equipment and trained personnel for local action plans of response to respond to disasters....,”are allowed.

Franklin County is a State of Florida designated fiscally constrained county. The proposed award represents 96.8 percent of total projected costs of up to \$775,000. The Franklin County Board of County Commissioners has approved \$25,000 as their suggested project match for Phase I.

While this project does not propose a new business or create jobs, a reliable public safety communications system is paramount to businesses wanting to expand or locate in Franklin County. The county’s emergency responders such as law enforcement, fire and rescue, emergency medical services and emergency operations are using an emergency communication system and devices (radios) that are aging, incompatible and inoperable with communication systems used by other federal, state and local public safety/first responder agencies.

A 2019 study by the MITRE Corporation uses several alternative methods to assess the value of equipment delivered using FEMA funding. The present project shares some of those characteristics. Subject matter experts assessed the monetary value of these investments when measured against standards of reduced risk of lives lost, of injuries, of time without necessities, or property damages, and of business losses, as well as quality of life. After weighting these categories, the study found an overall relative change in benefits of 5.4 percent from the model baseline in an application to 16 Florida counties, but that variance in the valuation of components driving this change was large and meant that a positive ROI could not be definitively associated with the FEMA spending. MITRE found similarly inconclusive results in applying revealed preference techniques and in applying breakeven analysis to examine the benefits to emergency preparedness spending.

Taken together, the enhanced emergency preparedness could be responsible for badly needed emergency communications capability in Franklin County. The project is clearly eligible for funding under the provisions enacted by the Legislature. However, it is not possible to assign a direct job count to the project. For this reason, staff score this project as a “B.”

Project Summary (based on information provided by the applicant)

The Franklin County Board of County Commissioners is requesting a \$750,000 Triumph grant to contract with a consultant to analyze the need, assist with the bid process and implementation of a new First Responder Communication System. The primary users of the proposed system will be the Franklin County Sheriff’s Office, Franklin County EMS and Fire, Franklin County Road Department, Franklin County School District, Weems Hospital, Carrabelle Police Department and the City of Apalachicola Police Department. Franklin County supports volunteer firefighter units in unincorporated Alligator Point, Eastpoint, and St. George Island. Secured radio communications are critical for 911 dispatch information to be received by the first responder and for first responders across the county to communicate with each other. The new system will replace the county’s aged radio communication network.

The overall project has been broken into two phases. The first phase, this request, is for funds for a consultant to analyze the needs of the county’s various first responders, assist with the bid process, and the implementation of the new system. The second phase, an additional Triumph request, will be for the actual purchase and installation of the equipment and training for all first responders. Franklin County plans to issue a competitive procurement for both the consultant and the radio system vendor. Franklin County anticipates that both Phase I and Phase II could be completed within 36 months.

Franklin County does not have the expertise nor the resources to evaluate first responder communication system needs. The county is requesting funds to procure a professional consultant to assist with the evaluation of the current system, identifying options, assist with the procurement and in the vendor selection process. In addition, the consultant may oversee the installation of the equipment and the training of the first responders.

This project is included on the Franklin County Local Mitigation Plan Project Priority List and is on the Franklin County Board of County Commissioners supported projects list. This project is essential for first responders to be able to effectively respond to the residents and visitors of Franklin County.

Franklin County's first responders are currently operating on two separate systems. The Sheriff's Office and EMS are utilizing the state's 800 system and the remaining first responder entities are operating on the county's aged VHF system. The county has maintained these systems since 2010 when they began using them. The current system has not been sufficient since the beginning due to the lack of interoperability between the first responders. In addition, the entire state is being mandated to move from SLERS to P25. Upgrade of the entire current radio system is not optional.

During emergencies and disaster events, Franklin County's first responders work closely with state law enforcement agencies and responders. These include, but are not limited to the Florida Highway Patrol, Florida Department of Law Enforcement, Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission, State Forestry Service, Florida Division of Emergency Management and other mutual aid agencies. It is imperative that all responding agencies have the capability to communicate with one another. In past events, outside agencies relied on being able to obtain a radio from the local agencies to ensure interoperability communications. The new communications system will lesson and/or eliminate this issue. Improved communication will increase public health, safety and protection of public and private property in the county.

The current system is not secure, information is not encrypted and can be easily disrupted. It has no redundancy if it becomes inoperable, and coverage isn't available in many areas due to dense forest and lack of cellular service. In several areas of the County, First Responders cannot communicate or receive communications from all other agencies.

While this project does not directly propose new businesses or job creation, law enforcement and first responder's ability to ensure safe communities for existing and new businesses and tourists is critical to creating an environment for economic development. Monetary returns on investment are often hard to calculate. However, investments in public safety infrastructure have been shown to reduce the risk of lives lost, injuries, time without necessities, property damage or loss, business losses, and quality of life. Without enhanced emergency response preparedness and infrastructure, the county would be at risk of not meeting the growing demands of the current population, tourism, and expanding business growth within the county. This improvement can positively affect the services provided to the public, making it more enticing for new businesses and tourists.

A new first responder communication system that can be easily upgraded and refreshed to keep pace with a growing population and calls for assistance positions will ensure that Franklin County keeps pace with the region. A new system will allow Franklin County to communicate with other first responders and all disproportionately affected counties to provide or receive needed assistance during emergency situations, which can save lives and property.

Franklin County tracks the number of calls that dispatch receives to be responded to by the various agencies. As Franklin County grows and traffic continues to increase it is anticipated that calls and response to calls will increase by at least 5 percent per year.

As the County grows in population and traffic from residents moving into the area along with increased tourism, it is anticipated that dispatch calls will increase as well. It is imperative that the communication system can provide reliable and continuous communication for the health and safety of our citizens and visitors.

In 2023, dispatch received over 41,000 calls across disciplines. Having no interoperability posed a stress on dispatchers relaying imperative information during response. Due to first responders operating on two separate systems and the lack of cell towers throughout the county, broken communications were experienced hindering the responding units.

Franklin County is committed to providing funds to maintain the new First Responder Communication System. Part of the procurement for the system in Phase II, will include a maintenance agreement that the county will fund as part of the cost match for the project. Dispatch is a main component of communications and will continue to remain in the budget to receive funding for sustainability.

Budget and Funding

Triumph \$750,000

Franklin County \$25,000

Total \$775,000