STATE AID PROGRAMS

The Department of State administers a program that provides technical and financial assistance to two or more units of local government that seek to achieve cost efficiencies through shared services, cooperative agreements, mergers, consolidations and dissolutions. The program's objective is to improve the delivery of local government services and reduce taxpayer costs. Funding is available to study the feasibility of sharing services, as well as functional and operational consolidations.

Examples of fire related grants include:

- Towns of Hamburg, Boston, Colden and Eden and Village of Blasdell and Hamburg — received $90,000 to consolidate fire, medical and police dispatching services.
- Village of Owego — received $28,350 to study consolidation of the Village and Town of Owego fire departments.
- Villages of East Hills, Roslyn Estates and Roslyn Harbor — received $99,000 to study consolidation of volunteer fire departments.
- Warren County — received $400,000 to construct the Warren/Washington Emergency Training Center.

More information is available online at:
http://www.dos.state.ny.us/lgss/smsi/index.html

COMMUNICATION IS KEY

Communication is critical throughout the consolidation process. There are many cultural issues which need to be addressed and resolved to ensure a successful consolidation. It is important to involve all the stakeholders (firefighters, residents, and elected officials) early on in the process, including:

- Keeping all stakeholders informed of what is being done, who is doing it, and why
- Explaining the advantages and disadvantages to consolidation to allow for open and honest communication
- Making sure that all meetings are open to the stakeholders
- Creating task forces to develop administrative, legal, and operational plans for consolidation action

Look for the Department of State's Publication on Fire Protection Consolidation Available in 2008

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FIRE DISTRICT CONSOLIDATION

New York State Department of State

Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor

FIRE DISTRICT CONSOLIDATION

Improving the effective and efficient delivery of services is the primary objective of consolidation.

Fire departments in fire districts are faced with increased costs and budgetary constraints. Consolidation can achieve efficiency and effectiveness of fire protection services by allowing for the better use of resources, reducing duplicative efforts, and providing greater flexibility and capability. Consolidation may also result in cost savings due to efficient use of resources and reorganization.

The driving force behind all decisions during the consolidation process should be the question: "What is in the public's best interest?"

The primary reasons to consider consolidation include:

- Cost savings and efficiency in providing fire protection services
- Increasing demands at all levels of government for funding of essential services
- Insufficient career staff or ability to recruit and retain volunteer staff
- Increasing service requirements, including hazardous materials, technical rescue, emergency medical services, and terrorism and natural disaster preparedness

CONSOLIDATION OPTIONS

Consolidation is possible through intermunicipal agreements or the joining of two or more fire districts.

"Operational consolidation" is the pooling of services, equipment, apparatus, and staff through intermunicipal agreements. An intermunicipal agreement can provide for the sharing of services between two or more fire departments or for the performance of a specific duty or responsibility to be carried out by one department on behalf of the other(s). Each fire department would remain legally and administratively separate. Intermunicipal agreements must be agreed upon by the governing bodies and should outline the terms of the agreement. This agreement would enable the parties to legally join their resources in order to achieve efficiency and economy.

Examples include:

- Combining training programs
- Dispatching the closest resource to an emergency incident
- Creating a central dispatch function
- Allowing one department to perform apparatus maintenance for the involved departments
- Pooling specialized resources, such as heavy rescue apparatus, hazardous materials teams, and rope rescue teams

"Jurisdictional consolidation" is the next step after operational consolidation, when fire districts look at whether it makes sense to fully combine their operations. This type of consolidation involves the dissolution of the existing fire districts to create a new single fire district. This process requires a complete merger or reorganization. The board of fire commissioners of each district must agree to dissolve the current districts and form a new fire district.

When considering jurisdictional consolidation, the involved partners will need to develop and address issues such as administrative and operating structures and the continuation of existing benefits.

BENEFITS OF CONSOLIDATING

The potential benefits of consolidation include:

- Improving response time
- Greater purchasing power
- Availability of career and volunteer members
- Centralizing fire department management and reducing administrative costs
- Centralizing the dispatching and communication network and other fire department support systems
- Standardizing procedures for operation and training
- Reducing insurance premiums based on improvements in the insurance rating
- Improving fleet management, such as having one central repair and maintenance facility for vehicles and apparatus
- Savings to taxpayers