PACIF First Responder Mental Wellness Scholarship Guidelines  
A pilot program exclusively for VLCT PACIF members

The Vermont League of Cities and Towns (VLCT) Property and Casualty Intermunicipal Fund (PACIF) is committed to helping its members promote and support the mental wellness of their covered first responders. The PACIF Board of Directors designated $50,000 in 2020 for this pilot scholarship fund to improve access to mental health training and support service programming for its members and their employees.

I. PURPOSE
The primary objective of these scholarships is to help PACIF members pay for specific mental health programming that focuses on mental wellness and PTSD prevention in first responders. In this pilot program, PACIF hopes to learn about member needs, program availability and costs, and the effectiveness of different approaches – all to improve PACIF’s future ability to target such funding most effectively.

Scholarships are available for individuals or groups, and PACIF will consider these applications through September 30th, 2020. Each member is eligible for only one scholarship in the calendar year.

II. ELIGIBILITY
To be eligible for this scholarship, the municipality must be a current PACIF member and the first responder agency for which the funding is desired must be directly covered by PACIF workers’ compensation. Volunteer fire and rescue agencies that PACIF places in the Vermont workers’ compensation assigned risk pool are not eligible for this scholarship directly, although they may participate in regional peer support trainings as described below. PACIF encourages members to pool their respective scholarships for access to larger-scope, more costly regional trainings.

Each complete application will be reviewed by a committee of VLCT’s Risk Management Services (RMS) staff, which will award scholarships based on the merits of the training or program described and on available funding. All award decisions are final. If you have some unique way to use scholarship funds, please call us in advance to gauge the acceptability of your idea.

Requests must be focused on PTSD prevention training or related services. For example:

- **Regional peer support group training**: a multi-day program, with a clinician onsite, that builds the peer support skills of individuals from multiple agencies. Ideally, these programs will include a follow-up component such as post-training support. Trainings approved to use these funds will be open to both PACIF and non-PACIF first responders. Members that want to inquire about or participate in a regional peer support training should contact Bobby Arnell at EAPFirst, 802-651-1842, for assistance with coordinating the proposed training and developing accurate pricing for members to include in their scholarship applications. PACIF will give funding preference to programs that engage multiple agencies in this type of coordinated and regional approach.

- **Peer support training for an individual agency**: a multi-day program, with a clinician onsite, that builds the peer support skills of attendees from a single agency or member. Ideally, these programs will include a follow-up component such as post-training support.

- **A range of services delivered by a clinician who has an established working relationship with a given agency**: To be eligible for funding, the member must first have identified and vetted a suitable
clinician to ensure that there is a good match between the agency and the provider. The vetting process is not eligible for funding. Once vetting is complete, examples of services eligible for funding could include:

- individual counseling sessions with employees and family members,
- initial mental wellness screenings and follow-up,
- critical incident support services, and
- ongoing training on wellness, mindfulness, resiliency, exercise, meditation, etc.

This resource could apply to a single agency or to multiple agencies within a given member (e.g. police department and full-time fire department) where both are covered by PACIF.

- **Resiliency training** that is grounded in evidence-based practices demonstrated to reduce the incidence of PTSD. This includes teaching self-regulatory skills such as mindfulness, progressive relaxation and other techniques that increase heart rate variability; teaching cognitive reappraisal skills; and promoting social supports and the incorporation of a gratitude practice into everyday life. This could be suitable for a larger agency or for groups of members that pool their funding to support a regional session.

- A simplified prevention-focused counseling program for individuals within an agency. We envision a member obtaining a proposal from a clinician for a package of these services on a “retainer” basis so that the services are available whether they are used or not. The contract with the provider might specify a maximum number of sessions. This helps an employer quickly refer an employee to the contracted provider to receive prevention-focused services on a no questions asked basis, simplifying the process for everyone involved. Even with this kind of “no questions asked” counseling services, it extremely important that a workers’ compensation claim be filed as soon as the employer is aware of an issue that may be work related.

### III. SCHOLARSHIP TYPES AND AMOUNTS

This is a 100% reimbursement scholarship that does not require matching funds from the member. This program may be used for any combination of individual, group, and/or regional training. Funds are also available to support establishing or enhancing a relationship with a licensed mental health clinician who has the skills and capabilities to support onsite mental health services.

The maximum award for regional peer support training is $2,000 per member. All other services or training programs are eligible for a maximum award of $1,000 per member. The minimum award is $500. Preference will be given to agencies that currently have little or no mental health support programming for their covered first responders.

### IV. APPLICATION GUIDELINES

- Completed applications will be reviewed continuously throughout the year up until September 30, 2020, which is the application deadline. No applications will be accepted after that date.

- Applicants will be notified of their application status in writing within 15 days of when PACIF receives the complete application. This notification will outline the nature and amount of the awarded funds and any limitations or conditions that apply. Any application that is rejected will receive the reason for the rejection.

- The application must include:
  - a detailed description of the training or the scope of service from the provider or entity,
- a one-page summary explaining why the applicant feels that participation in the program or training will benefit the mental health of the member’s first responders,
- a signature of approval from a senior municipal official (i.e. mayor, municipal manager or administrator, or selectboard member), and
- an official price quote for the proposed educational event or a contract proposal that includes the pricing and description of services to be provided.

- All clinicians, providers, or entities whose proposals are submitted for a scholarship must be currently Vermont licensed mental health providers or service agencies who have experience working with and providing mental health/PTSD prevention services or treatment to first responders. If PACIF is not familiar with a given provider, staff will consult external resources to verify the provider’s qualifications.

- Applicants are encouraged to include a copy of their Employee Wellness Policy or similar document that refers to first responder mental wellness. Although such a policy is not required, having one demonstrates a focus on stress injury prevention and will support the application process.

- Submit completed applications and supporting documents in one of three ways: email to adavis@vlct.org; fax to (802) 229-2211, Attn: Adam Davis; or mail to VLCT Attn: Adam Davis, 89 Main Street, Suite 4, Montpelier, VT 05602-2948. Scanned and emailed documents are preferred. You are encouraged to retain copies of all paperwork that you submit with your application.

- Direct all questions regarding the program to Adam Davis at 800-649-7915, ext. 1921.

- The 2020 scholarship application form is available at vlct.org/first-responder-mw-schol.

V. TO OBTAIN REIMBURSEMENT

- Submit detailed receipts or a cancelled check confirming that payment has been made no later than 30 days after the training program has been completed. For multiple sessions or scope of work applications that persist for an extended period, submit documents as soon as possible after the service has been paid for.

- If actual program costs differ from the award amount, PACIF will reimburse the lower of the two amounts.

- PACIF will not reimburse any costs that are also paid for by other grants or funding sources.

- All requests for reimbursement must be submitted no later than December 31, 2020. This gives us time to close out the budget year.

- Attach the following documentation:
  - For a training: the vendor’s invoice, proof of attendance, and a copy of the cancelled check that paid for the training.
  - For a counseling services contract: a copy of the signed contract with the provider’s business name, and a copy of the cancelled check(s) that paid for the contract.

- Please keep copies of all documents for your records.

- Submit your reimbursement request with supporting documentation to Adam Davis at VLCT by email, fax, or mail.