

Kansas Fire & Rescue Training Institute

2025 Annual Report



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- Page 3, clockwise from top left:
- 1. Governor Laura Kelly looks out at the crowd after speaking at the first Women’s First Responder Symposium in Salinas. Read more about the event on page 6.
 - 2. Participants laugh during a Rope Rescue Operations course hosted at the Leavenworth Fire Department on Oct. 15, 2025. The training benefitted 15 separate state agencies.
 - 3. Special Operations Training Coordinator Matt Breininger laughs during a live fire exercise at the Lawrence Douglas County Fire Department’s training facility on July 29, 2025.
 - 4. Participants in Camp Fury are instructed by a firefighter on proper hose advancement at Kansas City Kansas Fire Department’s Station 6 on June 12, 2025.
 - 5. A fire exercise at LDCFD’s training facility, July 29, 2025.
 - 6. An instructor wipes his face after a hot approach during a live fire exercise at the Lawrence Douglas County Fire Department’s training facility on July 29, 2025.
 - 7. A participant repels from a training tower at Leavenworth Fire Department during a Rope Rescue Operations course, Oct. 15, 2025.





A Statewide Step Together

On Sept. 19, KFRTI facilitated the state’s first Women’s First Responders Symposium in Salina, drawing over 160 women to discuss training, leadership, and education in fire, law enforcement and EMS in Kansas.

“This is a very stressful kind of job, and it is good to have a peer support group, not only for emotional support, but for career support,” said Governor Laura Kelly, who spoke at the event.

The event was a concerted effort from agencies across the state and country, including the Kansas State Fire Marshal, the Kansas Highway Patrol, the National Fire Protection Association, Reno County Emergency Medical Services, the Kansas Fire and Rescue Training Institute, and the Kingman Fire Department.



Top: Speakers laugh during a panel discussion of first responder leaders.

Above: Participants connect at the Symposium.

Right: K9 Gator greets a participant.



“As women we collectively fight similar battles both on and off duty and this event gives women the opportunity to see that we don’t have to fight those battles alone,” said Kansas State Fire Marshal Special Agent Melanie Miller, who helped organize the event. Special Agent Miller is the handler of K9 Gator, pictured left, who also attended the event. Both are certified in Human Remains Detection on land and water.

Speakers providing career advice and professional development were Sonta Wilburn, Interim



Left: Gov. Kelly speaks to the audience.



Director for the Center for Public Safety Leadership and former Deputy Chief of Overland Park P.D., Chrissy Bartel, president of the Kansas EMS Association, Chief Elizabeth Snow and Lieutenant Shannon Ward of the Wichita Fire Department, Satin Janssen, intelligence research specialist with the Bureau of Alcohol, Firearms and Explosives, KFRTI's own Jenn Johnson, and many more.

"By bringing women first responders together, we create community that is so important in this culture focusing on mental health and suicide prevention and all of the things that we've realized are a big issue for first responders, male and female," Director Johnson said of the event.

The group of agencies intends to continue to hold the event annually to foster community across the state and provide further access to professional education among first responders.

Questions during the panel discussion.





Reinvesting in Rescue

KFRTI instructor Sean Price was born and raised on a Kansas ranch, and like most Kansans he knows grain and the risks that come with it. Around 8 p.m. on Aug. 7, 2025, Price, who is full-time with Overland Park Fire Department, responded to Allen County dispatch's mutual aid request to Colony Fire Department, where Price volunteers, for a grain engulfment report.

"When lola got there they found him up to his neck. When I got there he was about mid-chest," Price explained. "So what we used is we took the coffer dams from Colony [Fire Department]. We put them around the victim and then we started to push them down. It was so dense and tight around the victim that we actually had to use a sledgehammer to actually shove them down."

The 66-year-old farmer, who was successfully rescued from the 10,000 bushel grain bin containing corn, was uninjured when freed after about 4 hours of efforts from the Allen County Sheriff's Office and rescue units from La Harpe, lola, Colony, and Anderson County. He was taken to a local hospital for evaluation.



Above: The original Grain Engulfment Rescue trailer

Left: Sean Price during a training.

Below: A simulated rescue in the trailer.





From the scene in Iola. Source: Allen County Sheriff's Office

KFRTI has provided grain engulfment rescue training across the state since 2012. The 35-foot training trailer that includes a grain bin, grain hopper and equipment to pull a person from a bin was the first of its kind when delivered 13 years ago. "We taught Oklahoma firefighters, Missouri firefighters, Colorado firefighters just because it was so unique," Price said.

"The departments that responded to LaHarpe were phenomenal. They all mentioned they had all gone through this training and they wanted to do it again," Price said. "It showed just a significant need of this training to exist because these firefighters, especially in a volunteer community, they don't get the opportunities of career training all the time," Price said, "so getting them the specialized training for when they have calls at local farms, it's very important for them because there aren't a lot of resources in those areas."

KFRTI purchased a new grain engulfment rescue apparatus this year to and will continue to train Kansas first responders statewide in this necessary rescue operation. Four courses are already planned for the new trailer in 2026, with more on their way.



Certification Innovation

KFRTI certified 1,064 firefighters in FY2025 while Erica Henderson was promoted to certification program coordinator and Nicole Bettes was promoted to senior certification administrative associate. The team simultaneously adapted to their new roles while working to modernize the certification system.



Erica Henderson on the Chromebooks.

A week prior to each test date, test kits are currently assembled and shipped to test coordinators across the state. While it is a proven method, it is weighed down by limited flexibility, postage fees and long waits for results. In January 2026 Henderson will be deploying laptops and wifi hotspots to KFRTI's regional instructors to create equal accessibility statewide to a familiar computer-based testing platform for all Kansas firefighters, making it easier on the workforce, cheaper for taxpayers and faster access to results.

"This was developed by the state of

Kansas for the state of Kansas,” Henderson said of the project, which she began in late 2024.

“We started exploring moving away from paper and pencil and moving to computer-based testing. We found out that here in this building, there’s a group that does computer-based testing for K-12 through the state of Kansas and many other places. We partnered with them to build a fire service-designed computer-based testing product,” Director Jenn Johnson said.

KFRTI partnered with KU’s Assessment & Technology Solutions department to execute the vision. The first tests have already been assessed in Galesburg, Arches County and Douglas County with improvements being made before the statewide rollout.

“Several of the students commented, ‘Oh, this is just like KITE,’ because they took exams on this system when they were in school. So for our younger folks, this transition should be fairly smooth,” Henderson said. Going forward, the certification team will be evaluating the data provided by the new testing system to constantly adjust test banks and evaluate questions for efficacy.

“We’ll keep trying to make it better, figuring out where we can improve on the program, making sure that the test banks and what we are testing is the absolute best.”

Top left: The first firefighters to certify in the new program.

Below: The new testing laptops.





From Camp to Career

Many Kansans took shelter in June's heat and humidity but for 30 high school girls it was time to gear up and test their dreams of becoming first-responders. This year KFRTI supported Camp Fury, a week for girls to meet women firefighters, police officers, EMTs and paramedics, and learn about the demands of these positions. KFRTI trains firefighters in every corner of the state and through aiding Camp Fury, KFRTI is developing every corner of the workforce.

"I've really appreciated this camp because it's opened my eyes to the different professions and given me more information about them," Falasteen Shalabi, a Kansas resident and camp participant, said. "Being here, seeing a fire, putting it out, having that adrenaline running made me want to just keep going."

Exposing Kansas' youth to these career paths is all part of the plan. "It's important to train the Kansas Fire Service, but it's also important to help sustain the Kansas Fire Service," KFRTI Director Jenn Johnson said of the effort to attract more high schoolers to firefighting. "In the same way that we're fostering community in these rural areas, we're cultivating belonging through the community to catalyze a culture in professional growth and development."

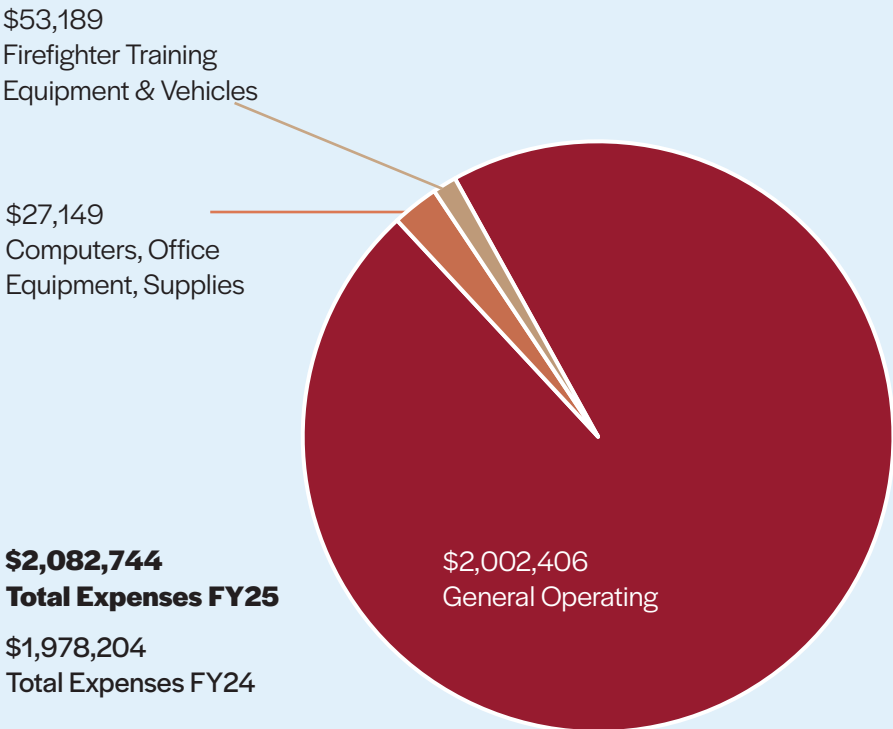
Alissa Harris, a Camp Fury alumnus, is now a firefighter at Kansas City Kansas Fire Department and returns to the camp to pay it forward. "In 2022, I attended KC's first Camp Fury, and through that experience I knew exactly who I wanted to be after only one week. I wanted to work as a firefighter and serve the community in which I grew up in."

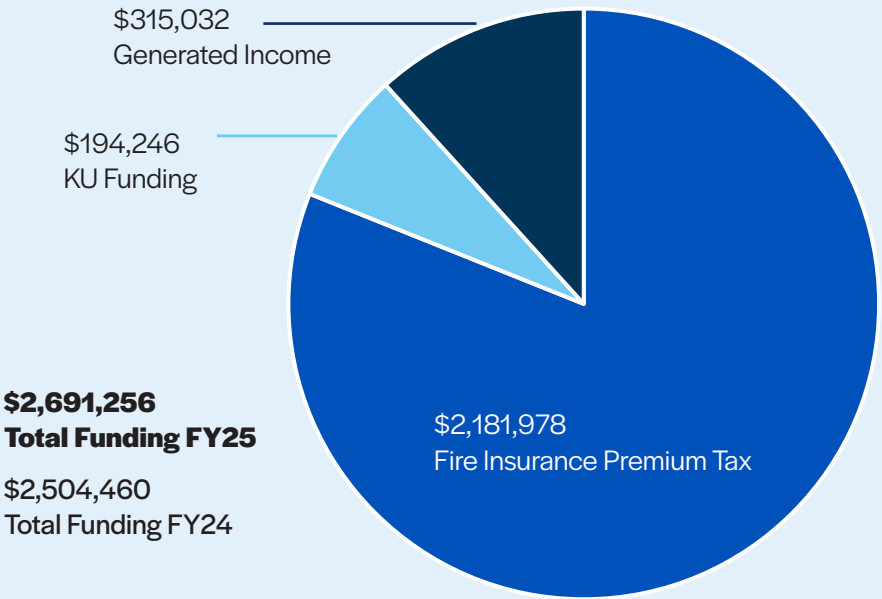
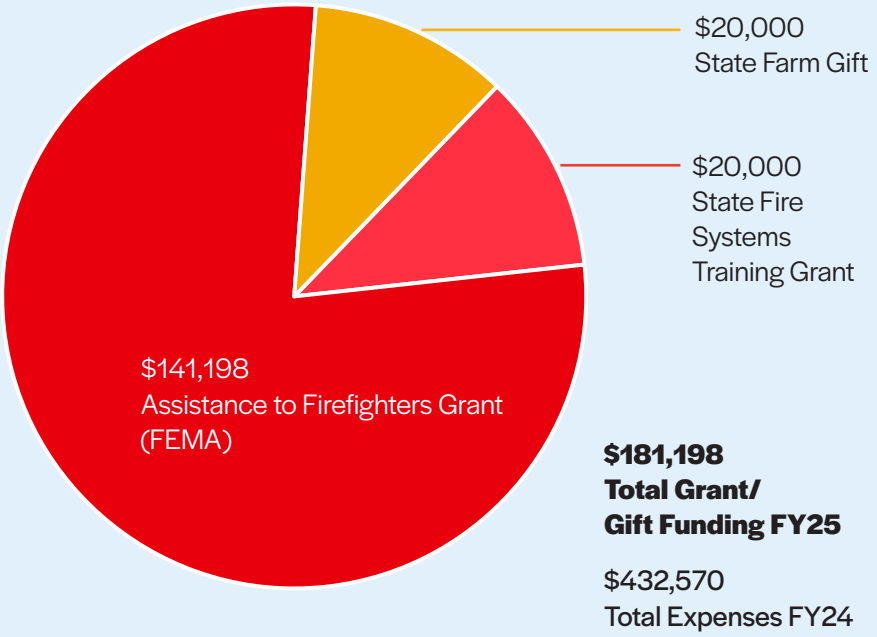


FY25 Funding Summary

KFRTI maintains financial stability through conservative fiscal stewardship and support from grant and gift funding. We train over 8,000 students annually and continuously innovate course delivery methods to expand our reach while maintaining fiscal responsibility.

Over the last 15 years, small increases in Insurance Tax funds, alternative funding sources and grants have been offset by reductions in state funding to the University (Kansas Fire & Rescue Training Institute had to share in those cuts) and increased operating costs.







Program Manager Ben Green, right, instructs participants in the Trench Tech course in Weston, Mo., Nov. 19, 2025.

Kansas Fire Fast Facts

- 499 registered fire departments in Kansas (US Fire Administration)
- 14,600 firefighters statewide (NFIRS data)
- 90% of Kansas fire service is classified as “Volunteer” or “Mostly Volunteer” (NFIRS data)
- 249,593 emergency incidents reported in Kansas in 2024 (NFIRS data). 2025 data is not available as the US Fire Administration is shifting to the new NERIS reporting platform.
- Recruitment and retention issues continue to challenge both career and volunteer fire departments (survey data)
- Mental and emotional health concerns, including PTSD and firefighter suicide, remain significant challenges.
- Wildland grass fires continue to have a significant economic impact on the state.

From the Director

It is my pleasure to present our 2025 Kansas Fire & Rescue Training Institute Annual Report. KFRTI has had a busy couple of years with changes and updates, and like all healthy organizations, continues to experience growth and evolution. This report outlines our key achievements, staffing updates, program developments, partnerships, and strategic goals as we continue to elevate fire service training and education throughout Kansas.

Since joining the Institute, I have been so impressed with the dedication and professionalism of our staff, the support from the leadership at Jayhawk Global, and the willingness of our state partners to collaborate. Together, we have strengthened KFRTI's role as a statewide leader in fire and emergency services training, ensuring that our programs remain current, relevant, and accessible to departments of all sizes and capacities.

Over the past year, we have expanded course offerings, enhanced training delivery methods, and implemented new technologies to better serve Kansas firefighters and emergency responders. From regional outreach programs to specialized technical courses, KFRTI continues to provide the highest quality training opportunities that reflect the evolving demands of today's fire service.

We are equally proud of our partnerships with local departments, state agencies, and national organizations that share our commitment to firefighter safety and excellence. These collaborations amplify our impact and ensure that Kansas' fire service community remains strong, resilient, and prepared for the challenges ahead.

As we look forward, our focus remains on innovation, inclusivity, and continuous improvement. By investing in our instructors, expanding our training resources, and strengthening our relationships across the state, KFRTI will continue to build on its long tradition of service and leadership.

Thank you for your continued support of the Kansas Fire & Rescue Training Institute. Together, we are shaping the future of fire service training in Kansas.



Sincerely,

Jenn Johnson

Director, Kansas Fire & Rescue Training Institute
Jayhawk Global | University of Kansas



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**Kansas Fire & Rescue
Training Institute**