

Friday, May 29, 2020

An update from Jonathan Bruno and Coalitions and Collaboratives, Inc

Times have indeed changed. Our work lives are now so intertwined with our personal lives that I sometimes cannot differentiate between the two. Dogs interrupt webinars and conference calls seem to fall during a needed laundry session. My world seems to have shrunk to the confines of a home office and my extensive Carhartt and nomex collection is now simply my pajamas. Here in Colorado, our stay at home orders have shifted to safer at home, with essential travel only. Once simple trips to pick-up toilet paper or a gallon of milk now involve a whole new level of risk and complexity. The reality of the situation is that uncertainty rules.

Within this uncertainty lies an opportunity. As wildfire mitigation professionals we are all very aware and cognizant of proactive measures to reduce exposure, limit the negative outcomes and still be able to work together. In our daily lives we take actions, not for today, but for tomorrow. We plan, we implement and we prepare for the wildfire that will come.

During this pandemic, I continue to think that we are likely one of the most aware groups of people when it comes to taking actions that will result in positive outcomes. Wildfire mitigation work requires that we all understand our communities' vulnerabilities and that we work to reduce exposure. We are all planners, doers and individuals that complete projects for the uncertain future. When we are faced with challenges we seek solutions, bring people together and use whatever means necessary to do right for our communities, ecosystems and people. The opportunity I see within all of this is the potential for all of us to get closer, to build existing relationships and foster new ones. Like our wildfire work we can use the events of today to build stronger, more resilient community connections and be better prepared for what comes our way.

I'd like to let you all know where the Action, Implementation and Mitigation (AIM) program stands and what the future may hold.

The AIM Program

When I first started thinking about how my organization could help others it was based on a few very simple premises.

1. Get as much money as possible to the ground. We are currently financially sound for 2020. I have applied for additional funding through the U.S Forest Service (USFS) to carry the program into 2022. While nothing is ever certain, I feel that we have the support to continue providing needed capacity funding to all of you. The AIM Team continues to seek non-Federal funding to bolster the program, and as they say – we have a few irons in the fire.

2. The AIM Program is about you and what you do.

From building partnerships to convincing a resident they need to take mitigation action to developing programs on a shoestring, you are the people and organizations accomplishing amazing things. We will continue to highlight your challenges, your needs and your work. Without people like you, mitigation cannot move forward. We will continue to support the capacity of place-based organizations, not solely acres.

3. Funding is only part of the solution. I will be the first to say that money sure helps to get work done. However, funding is not the only resource needed. Often communities know they have a risk and where that risk is. Communities and organizations need the financial ability to be nimble, to respond when opportunities arise and to be able to adapt to the changing landscape. In turn, we all need support and guidance when challenges arise. The AIM program can support your efforts far beyond the funding through our Mitigation Mentors Program. If you have questions, need technical assistance or just want to talk, we are here for you. I wish I could have reached out to a Mitigation Mentor when, back in 2002, I was told to start a forestry program. Many of the mistakes I made could have been resolved with only a conversation.

AIM Program Tools and Updates

- **Mitigation Challenges:** Call or email any of the AIM Team members to discuss your mitigation barriers or challenges. We will provide training, assign a Mitigation Mentor to support your efforts and do everything in our power to assist.
- **Award Extensions:** COVID-19 has complicated all of our work plans. If you have challenges associated with your current AIM Award timeline, please reach out. While we cannot guarantee that we will be able to accommodate an extension or modification we will do everything we can to support your success.

- **Award Advances:** For current AIM Award recipients, we have negotiated an advance payment opportunity that can provide an advance for work planned to be completed within a thirty-day window. If you need some funding before the work is completed please reach out to an AIM Team member. We are still required to follow the regular reimbursement guidelines with advance payments.
- **Round 4:** Award announcements went out to the six successful applicants this past week. We look forward to working with these groups on their wildfire resiliency efforts.
 - Alpine Area Wildfire Protection Coalition, Wyoming
 - Hawaii Fire Management Organization, Hawaii
 - Durango Fire Protection District, Colorado
 - Mountain Valleys Resource Conservation & Development Council, North Carolina
 - Kittitas County Conservation District, Washington
 - Meade County FireWise, South Dakota
- **Mitigation Best Practices (MBP) Training:** Several of you participated in the February MBP training in Boise, ID and provided great feedback on the course and content. Overall, I think the training was successful, however, we know that we can always do better. We are continually evaluating the program, our teaching methods and approaches to provide the best learning opportunity that we can. This summer, we will launch an online 4-week MBP training. With extra time at home this may be a great opportunity for you or your staff to join and learn. The online class will have more (virtual) interactions, assignments and discussions. I am pretty excited to try this new delivery method. Stay tuned for more.

As we all face an ever-changing future, know that the AIM Team and Coalitions and Collaboratives, Inc is here to help. We will be releasing the Round 5 application on June 1 and will continue to work for all of you. Thank you for your hard work, passion and desire to reduce risk and adapt. If you need anything do not hesitate to reach out and please be safe.