

Action, Implementation & Mitigation (AIM) Program

Summer 2020/Round 5



Summer 2020 AIM Funding Webinar Questions and Answers

Many organizations need capacity, what makes a proposal more competitive?

During the webinar we used the word “compelling” frequently and that relates to the story you tell. When 5-7 people who know nothing about your area are reviewing your application, our desire is for them to finish the review and go “ah ha, this one is worth funding.” That means that the group (or organization) has clearly articulated the need and has submitted a proposal where it’s easy to see how it will aid the group’s forward momentum and support meaningful and impactful risk reduction work.

Should all projects have some direct tie to hazardous fuels reduction even if it's a capacity building/personnel focused application?

The short answer is yes. If you are requesting personnel capacity, hopefully that person is either performing work on the ground, maybe as a mitigation specialist or forester, or if the position is an administrative person and though they may never get out in the field, we would hope they are performing tasks that allows the other staff to focus on collaborative efforts or spend more time on the ground. Capacity building can also involve engaging a facilitator to lead a collaborative effort that would ultimately lead to hazardous fuels reduction at some point.

Would COCO look favorably at paying for partnership development between organizations that offer cost-share funding for fuel reduction treatments, or should it be capacity building only within our organization?

The capacity building does not need to be just within your organization; however, it does need to be clear who is managing the funding, how decisions will be made on the expenditures, and who is responsible for providing the match. The question is unclear as to whether the partnership development relates to the cost-share program(s) so if you want to clarify please give us a call.

Do we need to show how we will maintain funding for the position in the future? or can we ID that as part of our capacity need as well?

If your proposal makes it to the application stage, the application does have a question related to sustainability. We recognize that it may be difficult, especially for grant-funded organizations, to know if they will be able to find funding to continue a position but articulating known grant opportunities that you hope to apply for, or a promise from a county or city should be articulated. You can articulate the need for future funding but we are really looking for something concrete as to how you hope to approach sustaining the position. At this time, the AIM funding is only for one year.

Does the cash match requirement include a community chipping program where many landowners have already contributed labor to creal the material to be chipped? I.e. do they need to do the work and then pay cash as well?

Yes. One of the main premises of the AIM program is that we want to support and cultivate sustainable organizations and programs. It is also one of the main reasons that we offer our Mitigation Mentors program -- we are willing to work with you to help create sustainable programs. While we recognize the value of volunteer hours, our collective experience and social science research has clearly shown that:

- 1) most people expect, and are willing, to pay something for services rendered, and
- 2) people are more likely to continue an activity when they have made a financial investment, not just a time investment

Another way to look at it is -- let's say the 50+ organizations that attended the webinar all wanted \$50,000 to support their chipping program, which the organizations currently offer for free. This is not a sustainable practice as there simply is not enough grant money to allow that to happen year after year.

I'm working on starting a goat grazing business... currently it's an LLC. I'm looking for a land owner partner to host my business. Is this something that might help us purchase goats?

No, the grant could not help with the purchase of goats. This grant opportunity is not open to private businesses; it is intended to assist wildfire councils, fire departments and other nonprofit organizations involved in hazardous fuels reduction.

However, if an organization had a project that involved using the goats for fuels reduction, that would be entertained as a proposal (through a nonprofit organization). Residents and homeowner associations are not eligible to apply for the grant.

Do you fund planning efforts, such as a 5-year strategic organization plan that supports implementation of CWPP?

We do support CWPP implementation; however, since prioritization of projects is supposed to be part of the CWPP development, there would need to be a very compelling reason to fund further planning efforts. Furthermore, a detailed description of what actions have been completed (if a CWPP is undergoing an update) is essential to understand why a new CWPP is needed.

Could efforts from another Capacity Building Grant geared toward forest health and wildfire resilience be counted toward in-kind match for AIM? It is not an on-the-ground implementation grant, but a grant that supports that work along with partnership development and a landscape prioritization plan for other organizations on a regional scale.

Yes. We are fairly flexible on accepting match as long as it is not from another federal grant source and if the program of work aligns with the proposed use of AIM funding.

How many awards and/or what amount of money do you expect to offer during this grant round?

We have about \$500,000 to award and have typically awarded 5-6 grants in the past four rounds of funding. That being said, generally not everyone asks for the full \$50,000 so we have the flexibility to offer more awards if the applications are outstanding.

What if the 1:1 cash match is coming from the town general fund? Do you still want to see individual property owner contributions?

Yes. Our goal is to support and cultivate sustainable organizations, not provide free services to residents. As with the current pandemic, wildfire is an issue where we will be successful if we take the approach of, "We are all in this together." We all have a role to play AND a contribution to make.

Would biochar be considered a burn type that would not be included in this round of funding?

Biochar is not excluded in this round of funding; however, based on some concerns regarding the efficacy of biochar operations, we would want to see a very compelling justification for its use.

There was mention on your RFP that Disadvantaged Communities (DAC) may be eligible for a less than 25% match requirement for private landowners. Can you elaborate? What sort of documentation/justification would you need in these cases, for disadvantaged communities and lower match requirements? DAC is a census designated community or block group. They are actually officially designated areas.

Whatever name it goes by -- low income program, DAC -- what we want to see is a well-thought out program that details:

- Is this a new or existing program for your organization

- Your outreach plan to engage residents
- How are you determining the resident's eligibility (income level, disability, etc.) and what documentation are you requiring from them
- Description of how you are determining that the resident's actually own their homes (and can authorize treatment), etc.
- Map showing the area is indeed considered to be at high risk of wildfire

Just like with any cost-share program description, we also want to see the specific details on the program such as:

- Who will conduct the assessment of what needs to be done?
- Will your organization provide the mitigation crew or would you hire a contractor?
- If you hire a contractor, what is your process to vet them?
- What are your requirements if the residents are allowed to choose the contractor? More than one bid required? Must they take low bid or choose the contractor they are comfortable with?
- Who inspects the completed work ?
- Do you require any volunteer time towards the project or a minimal cash contribution?
- Are you requesting a full or partial waiver of the homeowner contribution?
- Do you require any home hardening efforts (removing needles from gutters and roofs, moving firewood, etc.) or just the creation of defensible space?
- How many acres do you hope to treat?
- Where you would derive the additional match from as a 1:1 match for all grant funds would still be required?

There are funding opportunities, like CAFA (formerly Stevens grant), for private lands adjacent to national forests that do not require a match (though the grant has other stipulations). Have you explored other funding opportunities? We mention this because having a CAFA or possibly a FEMA grant that requires less match is much less impactful on the organization in terms of providing match. While we recognize the importance of engaging all sectors of the population in reducing wildfire risk, we also recognize that these types of programs can be challenging and quite time consuming for the organization.