



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS Action, Implementation and Mitigation (AIM)

What do you expect to be the average size of grants?

Every round of funding is different and the amount of grants vary from the minimum (\$10,000) to the maximum amount (\$75,000).

Does COCO provide awards to grant applicants for dollar amounts different than the requested amount?

Yes. There have been projects in the past in which we have funded only a partial amount of the overall grant request. This is dependent on fellow applicant requests, available funding and your program's requests.

How many proposals can be submitted at a time?

An organization can put in as many proposals as they want, but only one project will be funded per fiscal organization. The ranking committee focuses on the quality of each application, specifically if the project addresses building local capacity and if it addresses gaps or is at a tipping point.

How many applications do you typically receive vs. how many do you fund? How competitive is the AIM grant?

We typically received 30 to 35 concept papers with every funding round. Selection of awarded programs is dependent on the applicant's program proposal and competition is dependent on the quality of applications that come in that round. In the past we have awarded a minimum of five organizations and at most, have funded eight.

Are all applications competing nationally, or just within a certain geography like a state or USFS region? Will COCO fund more than one application in that same geography?

AIM applications are competing nationally. COCO will fund more than one application in the same geography depending on the quality of the application and how compelling a case is made that AIM will move the organization past a tipping point. We urge applicants to coordinate and collaborate on efforts within a region if feasible. Receiving separate applications from different organizations working on risk in the same area raises questions regarding collaborative risk reduction activities.



Are adjustments/refinements in the original concept paper permitted, expected in response to COCO comments?

Yes, if asked to move to the application phase adjustments/refinements to the original concept paper are permitted per COCO comments. An overall project theme change is not permitted and may result in a lower rank.

Would you differentiate between "pure" mitigation projects and other preparedness, suppression activities such as funding cisterns, adopting regulations (which can't be guaranteed) or post-fire rehab work?

AIM funds are specifically set for pre-fire mitigation work. Cisterns and fire fighting specific equipment are not allowable under the AIM grant program. AIM cannot support any suppression activities or post-fire rehab work. If you are looking to adopt locally produced wildfire regulations (i.e. WUI Codes and Ordinances), an AIM Concept Paper can be made under the Planning Category, however, please explain how adopting these regulations will advance your programs and eventually lead to more work on the ground.

Can work be done on State lands? And, could training (i.e. non-productive work) be done on Federal land? A State parcel surrounded by private land.

We cannot fund any work on federal land. In general State owned lands are eligible for other funding sources. AIM Grant funding may not be the best source for this type of work. Please contact Jonathan Bruno at jonathan@cusps.ws for more details on using AIM funds for work on State lands.

Please discuss the homeowner match.

COCO expects buy-in from every homeowner receiving mitigation services. All private landowners, with the means to financially support mitigation work on their property, should contribute financially to at least half the cost of the work. This is a best practice that is meant to increase homeowner ownership and long-term project maintenance.

In addition to volunteer hours, does AIM expect a cash match from organizations?

Providing cash match from organizations highlights the investments, collaboration and commitment from diverse resources, but it is possible to cover the 100% match of your grant through in-kind contributions. We do not require you to provide a certain amount of cash match unless proposing fuel reduction projects on private land. In this case, homeowners must provide a 50% cash match contribution to the mitigation occurring on their property.



Would there be a cash match required for community-based projects (i.e. where there isn't an individual homeowner involved but, say, an HOA)?

Yes. We expect a cash match for community-based projects, however, if your project is on HOA land or community property the cash match component can come from HOA dues and/or additional sources besides individual homeowners.

Does the 50/50 match apply to an already free program that requires homeowners to do the work (i.e. a chipping program that has specifications for chipping pile size that homeowners build themselves)? Do we need to track that in-kind time?

The 50/50 match applies to an already free program. You will need to track the in-kind homeowner time if it goes towards your grant's 1-to-1 match.

On large tracts of land (160 or more acres), is there still a required 50% match? I see this as a hindrance to doing large scale mitigation.

COCO understands that a 50% cash match from a landscape level treatment may be hard for a single landowner to take on. If you are putting in a Concept Paper for a single landowner landscape scale project please explain how you will get the 1-to-1 cash match for the entire project and other ways the landowner or community can match this project (i.e. using Title III, in-kind match, equipment usage, etc.). Additionally, because the AIM program is focused on supporting communities, we expect you to describe how the project will benefit more than one individual property owner.

What criteria do you need to determine a disadvantaged community?

Disadvantaged Communities (DACs) is a designation in California, however COCO is using this term to describe assisting residents who cannot afford to pay the 50% cash match for fuel reduction projects. COCO will make exceptions to the 50% cash match for individuals with economic and health burdens. Applicants should describe the communities' needs and the process at which they are assessing the need for a reduced or no-cash match from a homeowner who falls within this description. Applications assisting DACs in high-risk wildfire areas still require a proposal with 1-to-1 total match for the requested AIM funds.

The RFP states that Disadvantaged Communities (DAC) may be eligible for a less than 50% match requirement for private landowners. What sort of documentation/justification would you like to see in the Concept Paper for disadvantaged communities and lower match requirements?

- 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

Please give some criteria for implementing cost-share programs.

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?

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?

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.

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.

Does the cash match requirement include a community chipping program where many landowners have already contributed labor to create 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.

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.

Any chance of an exception to the \$5,000 equipment policy, if a \$50,000 air curtain burner is what you really need to hit a tipping point? Our area has potential to build 1000s more slash piles, but we've run into capacity limits to getting them burned, due to personnel available, and fewer and fewer days with sufficient snow depth. We're working on expanding that capacity by looking at options to extend the burn window, like an air curtain burner, working with the county on staffing and plumbing for dry day burning, etc.

There will not be an exception to the \$5,000 equipment category at this time. We are contractually obligated to follow regulations from our federal contract with the U.S. Forest Service and there are equipment regulations we are currently upholding under this contract.

Under the 'Equipment' category, is funding for a robust website (including an online networking platform) eligible (as part of a larger project building communication and networking between stakeholders)?

AIM may support this type of project but it needs to be clearly described in the application how the networking website will increase your organization's capacity and eventually lead to more work on the ground. This proposal may not be as competitive compared to an organization looking to directly support their personnel capacity needs or a cross boundary fuel reduction project.



Does the AIM grant support purchasing grazing animals such as 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 or other eligible entity). Residents and homeowner associations are not eligible to apply for the grant.

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.
