

Action, Implementation & Mitigation (AIM) Program

Request for Concept Papers



Background

Coalitions and Collaboratives Inc. (COCO), a Colorado-based nonprofit, started the Action, Implementation and Mitigation (AIM) Program to accelerate fire adaptation concepts and reduce the risk from wildfire across the U.S. by increasing capacity and on-the-ground work. Since inception we have supported over 90 organizations. COCO hopes to increase community resilience, restore fire-adapted ecosystems and create safer conditions for firefighters and residents.

This funding opportunity is open to organizations working to advance wildfire risk reduction. **Homeowner associations, property owner associations, and metro districts are NOT eligible**, due to the amount of funding available. It is COCO's goal to offer both financial help and mentorship to applicants who are at a tipping point to move their program(s) or organization forward. This support will, in turn, benefit homeowner and property owner associations across a broader landscape.

COCO funds place-based, solution oriented organizations, across the country that focus their work on programs and projects that increase communities' ability to overcome barriers to successful community wildfire mitigation, multiplies the efforts, achieves quantifiable outcomes, and supports equitable and inclusive programs across the fence.

We believe that local solutions can solve global problems.

The AIM Grant is available for a wide variety of capacity-building activities, including personnel, equipment under \$5,000, planning efforts, and wildfire risk reduction work (on non-federal lands only). Applicants must show how their project proposal fits into the bigger wildfire mitigation landscape and are encouraged to coordinate with government partners on nearby public lands projects.

1. Eligible Organizations

- Regional and local collaborative efforts
- Fire Safe Councils and/or Wildfire Councils
- Nonprofit groups that undertake hazardous forest fuel reduction treatment projects in partnership with local, state or private entities
- Fire Departments
- Conservation Districts

- Tribes
- City or county government
- University or Colleges

Homeowner or property owner associations, metro districts, road districts, etc. are **NOT** eligible to apply regardless of nonprofit or tax status.

Expectations

- The community and/or project area must be considered at moderate to high-risk from wildfire and be in reasonable proximity to public lands. Applicants are encouraged to work with local federal personnel (USFS/BLM/NPS/BIA) in determining where federal treatments are planned for the WUI and how to best coordinate AIM project work on non-federal lands in proximity to federal treatment areas (past or future). While risk is subjective, we expect the applicant to explain how risk, and the values at risk, have been identified within their proposal.
- Proposals must lead to a meaningful increase in local capacity and on-the-ground wildfire risk reduction activities.
- The county, community or fire district should have an approved Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) or Wildfire Risk Assessment covering the project area, or have one underway.
- **Organizations must:**
 - be open to feedback and guidance from COCO on proposed mitigation projects.
 - be willing to share their lessons, challenges and successes.
 - comply with all grant reporting requirements and meet project completion milestones and deadlines.
 - participate in several AIM calls and monthly reporting throughout the duration of the project.
- **Applicants must contribute:**
 - a 100% non-federal match (cash or in-kind match is eligible) for a 1:1 grant to match ratio.
 - If fuels reduction occurs on private property, a 50% cash match from residents is required.
 - If supporting disadvantaged, underserved or at-risk populations, in moderate/high-risk areas, a 50% cash match is still required, but can be from other local sources.
 - COCO requires applicants to explain the process used to identify underserved, at-risk, disadvantaged populations, including an application process and/or income threshold.
- Award funding will range from \$10,000 - \$75,000. AIM awards are on a 12-month timeline. **The anticipated funding award start date is May 2022.**

2. AIM Grant Purpose

Project proposals must fit within one or more of the following categories:

A. Personnel Capacity

COCO recognizes that it is difficult, if not impossible, to complete projects without adequate staffing, whether that be someone to run incentive programs, motivate residents, conduct wildfire risk assessments, lay out projects, or answer the calls. If your proposal is seeking funding for a staff position, articulate how that position will increase your capacity for accomplishing on-the-ground work, and your plans to sustain that position over time.

B. Planning Efforts*

COCO recognizes how valuable planning efforts like Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPP) and Community Wildfire Risk Assessments can be, especially when developed collaboratively with a wide array of stakeholders and partners. Applicants should discuss their capacity to facilitate such planning efforts, how the effort fits into their overall work program, and how the planning effort will help advance their on-the-ground wildfire mitigation efforts. Efforts like the development of prescribed burn plans also fit into this category. COCO supports cross-boundary collaboration, however AIM funding cannot be used for planning projects that focus exclusively, or primarily, on federal lands.

**When applying for funding to support an update to an existing plan, please explain what was accomplished since the initial plan's creation and why the plan needs to be updated. Simply stating that the plan is outdated is not sufficient to explain why a new plan is needed. Discuss who will lead the implementation effort.*

C. Reduction of Hazardous Fuels

Hazardous fuel reduction / forest management projects should be strategic, at an impactful scale, on or adjacent to moderate/high wildfire risk areas near public lands, designed to limit the potential risk to life, property, infrastructure, and other high-valued assets. COCO places a preference on projects which prioritize community values and assets first.

Effective mitigation treatments may be implemented across jurisdictional boundaries on non-federal land. All projects within this focus area must clearly articulate why the funding is not available from another source, how it leverages other funding opportunities, or meets a shortfall, and how the project is an essential component to the overall mitigation strategy for the area.

Applicants should consider all elements required to implement treatments on-the-ground, including acquiring necessary permits and consultations. *Priority will be given to proposals that clearly articulate how the organization's capacity will be increased versus proposals that simply treat acres.*

D. Equipment purchases under a total value of \$5,000

If seeking funding for equipment/supplies please describe the following:

- Discuss how you plan to use and maintain the equipment.
- Explain how adding this equipment/supplies to your organization will increase your capacity.
- If applicable, identify the staff members that are qualified or will be trained to operate the equipment.

Examples of successfully funded programs:*

The list below highlights projects and programs that we have funded in the past.

- Hiring a Mitigation Coordinator or fuels/forestry staff to increase on-the-ground mitigation activities
- Hiring staff to develop or manage a chipping or slash-disposal program
- Hiring staff to conduct home site assessments
- Hiring administrative staff to assist with grant reimbursement requests and reporting, especially if it frees up time of technical specialists or the Executive Director
- Providing training programs for homeowners, fire department personnel or others specific to mitigation activities (chainsaw training, Mitigation Best Practices, prescribed fire or other pertinent training)
- Developing a wildfire mitigation collaborative (i.e. paying for facilitator or staff)
- Creating defensible space around homes and structures, based on approved defensible space guidelines
- Constructing fuel breaks, based on approved guidelines
- Reducing fuels beyond defensible space, especially designed to reduce fire intensity and protect water supplies or other valued resources
- Removing usable materials with specific utilization plans; removal of slash including chipping, mulching, grinding, or mechanical removal
- Developing Community Wildfire Protection Plans or Community Wildfire Risk Assessments that identify wildfire risk and make specific recommendations on ways to improve wildfire preparedness and define areas in need of treatment
- Equipment purchases to support the larger community wildfire mitigation program of work (Computers, software, and GPS Units under \$5,000 /Mitigation equipment or mitigation supplies under \$5,000 such as chainsaws or trailers).
- Developing prescribed fire burn plans
- Prescribed burning, pile burning, or broadcast burning

Examples of Projects that **DO NOT** qualify for this funding opportunity:

- Grant writing
- Suppression programs or projects (i.e. purchase of fire fighting equipment and/or fire training, development of a wildland module)

- Construction of permanent infrastructure (i.e. buildings or road construction)
- Local, state or federal policy development or advocacy
- Projects undertaken by and benefiting only one (1) individual property owner
- Projects on federal lands
- Mitigation projects reducing risk on private land that do not meet the 50% cash match requirement (Exceptions may be made for projects that include supporting disadvantaged communities and at-risk populations. See Matching Funds #5 below.)
- Prevention messaging (reducing human-caused ignition) or development and printing of brochures for education purposes

**To learn more about our current and past awardees and their work please visit our website <https://co-co.org/programs/aim-partnership/>.*

3. Coordination Efforts

Applicants must coordinate proposed projects with relevant county, state or federal officials to ensure consistency with county-level wildfire risk-reduction activities. The application should identify which officials were consulted and the outcome of those discussions. ***If selected to move your proposal to the online application phase, you will be asked to supply two letters of support with your application.*** Letters of support should be from local officials and key partners who understand how the project will benefit your program and move mitigation efforts forward in your area (i.e. Board of County Commissioners, Emergency Manager, Tribal Leader, Fire Chief, USFS, State Forestry, BLM, etc.).

4. Geography Relevant to Federal Land (informational)

Applicants must demonstrate that their proposed project will take place in close proximity to, or adjacent to, U.S. Forest Service (USFS) or other federal public lands projects that are planned and/or previously treated. Maps identifying current, recent and proposed projects should be available through your local USFS/BLM/NPS/Tribal offices. A map showing identified wildfire risk for your project area is also critical and ***will be required if you are asked to submit an application.*** Your local state forest service office or federal land manager may be able to assist you with developing maps if you do not currently have that capability.

5. Matching Funds

All applicants will be required to demonstrate an ability to match 100% of requested grant resources. The match may be in the form of a private or state dollar-for-dollar match. Proposals that demonstrate a local investment, like County, City or Fire Department funding, or a local resident contribution will be given stronger consideration. If your proposal involves a chipping program, slash removal, cost-share program, and/or mitigation work on private property, the awardee must document at least a **50% cash match** from the home or property owner. Exceptions may be made for projects that include supporting disadvantaged communities and

at-risk populations, however the applicant must still show a 100% match to the total project budget.

In-kind match may include donated supplies, equipment or time. Donated volunteer or equipment time should be accounted for using designated rates and have supporting documentation such as sign in sheets. If your organization does not have designated volunteer rates, a \$28.54 per hour volunteer in-kind rate will be used. COCO will assist funded organizations in creating a system to manage this documentation if you do not currently have that capability.

6. Reporting and Monitoring Requirements

Recipients will be required to provide monthly project updates. Upon completion of the project, recipients must report on project outcomes that resulted from utilizing AIM funds or were enabled because of AIM capacity support, including the following that apply to your project:

- A. Number of homes/properties treated or protected
- B. Number of acres treated (under AIM *and* those treated by collaborative partners on adjacent public lands)
- C. Cost per acre to treat
- D. Number of partnerships created or enhanced
- E. Cubic yards of woody material generated and removed
- F. Number of jobs created/maintained
- G. Number of volunteers and hours donated
- H. Matching funds acquired as a direct result of receiving this grant
- I. Use of any forest products generated
- J. Map of project area
- K. GIS data related to project
- L. Before and after pictures
- M. How activities or outcomes increased from baseline conditions (i.e. 20% more homeowners or 5% more HOAs engaged; increase in the number of slash sites from 0 to 2 or increase in chipper program participants from 20 to 75; increase in slash chipped from 100 tons to 250 tons).

AIM Grant Concept Paper Instructions

OVERVIEW

Thank you for your interest in the *Action, Implementation, and Mitigation (AIM) Grant*.

The Concept Paper is the opportunity for the Coalitions & Collaboratives to learn about your capacity needs, mitigation projects and program, and provide feedback prior to selecting final applicants for full proposal submission. This process allows the team to work closely with the finalists to develop competitive proposals that align with the goals of the funding. We anticipate funding may be available by May 2022.

Concept Paper Deadline: Feb 18, 2022 5:00 PM MT

Before you begin:

- Read through the entire RFP and Concept Paper form before constructing your responses. The Concept Paper is linked on the Coalition and Collaboratives website here: <https://co-co.org/get-involved/grants/aim-grant/>.
- Reference the AIM Award Program Criteria from page two (2) as you formulate your Concept Paper to make sure you have answered all questions relevant to your proposal.
- All character limits include spaces. Please do not exceed these limits.
- We accept applications from projects in various stages of development (design, development, and implementation).
- Each question is intended to elicit a different thoughtful response that will help reviewers understand your concept. Please do not cut and paste responses.
- **Priority will be given to proposals that clearly articulate how the organization's capacity will be increased versus proposals that simply treat acres.**

CONCEPT PAPER PROCESS

The deadline for submitting your Concept Paper is **Friday, February 18, 2022, 5:00 PM MT**. Please email your completed proposal in a single pdf format to: mitch@cusp.ws.

Following the AIM team review of the Concept Papers we will contact the project manager with selected organizations to discuss the proposal, provide feedback, and identify ways that the AIM team may be able to help projects move forward. The team will work with applicants to create a more competitive application; however, being asked to submit a full application does not guarantee the proposal will be selected for funding. **Full applications will be due on April 1, 2022.** Applicants of non-selected proposals will be notified via email.

For questions regarding the Concept Paper, please contact: Mitch Dahlke, Wildfire Mitigation Specialist (mitch@cusp.ws | 719-922-1749) or Jonathan Bruno, CEO (jonathan@cusp.ws | 719-433-6775).

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Your Organization's Involvement in Wildfire Risk Reduction Activities:** What programs (slash removal, chipping, cost share, home assessments, pile or broadcast burning, CWPP development, etc.) does your organization currently offer residents or property owners? Please provide statistics on your risk reduction accomplishments in 2021. What do you see as your biggest barrier to accomplishing more mitigation and/or growing your program? What do you see as your biggest funding need? *(1,250 characters)*
2. **Proposal Description:** Clearly describe what your proposal involves, including objectives and goals, the role of key players, anticipated outcomes, and why the program or project is needed. *(3,000 characters)*

In addition, be sure to address the following for any category for which you are seeking AIM funding.

For Personnel: *Discuss the number of hours the person will work, what those hours will be spent on, how that position will increase your capacity for accomplishing on-the-ground work in the near future and whether you are leveraging other funding for the position.*

For Planning Efforts: *Describe the area to be covered by the CWPP or Community Assessment and the roles of key players (time, meeting support, facilitation, technical expertise or other contributions). Explain your past successes with similar planning efforts, if applicable, and how those planning efforts helped to increase the ability of the residents, fire department, county, or nonprofits to complete mitigation efforts. Be sure to include how the past CWPP was used and what conditions have changed that warrant an update or new plan.*

For Fuels Reduction Projects: *This should be more specific than the project description. Include how many treatments will be applied to the area and what kind of treatment will be used (i.e. removing vegetation, bull hogging, hand treatment, or logging, and burning slash, piling slash, chipping, reseeding, etc.), and the acreage treated. Also explain how this project aligns with the active, proposed or past projects on nearby lands, public or private. If supporting disadvantaged communities (DACs) please explain the process used to identify DACs, including an application process and/or income threshold.*

For Equipment under \$5,000: *Describe the following: 1. How the equipment will be used, 2. How often the equipment will be in use, 3. Identify the staff members that are qualified or will be trained to operate the equipment. 4. Explain how adding this equipment to your organization will increase your capacity.*

3. **Strategic Value of Project:** Describe how this project will either increase local capacity for wildfire resilience, or act as strategic seed money to advance fire adaptation efforts. Think of the issue or opportunity your organization is facing, how you would like to respond to that issue or opportunity, the outcomes that will be achieved, and how that ties into your overall program efforts related to wildfire risk reduction. *(1,500 characters)*

4. **Maintenance and Sustainability:** Clearly demonstrate how this proposal will remain effective over time by outlining commitments from partners or property owners, monitoring measures, and potential future funding (anticipated or committed). *(1,000 characters)*
5. **Budget and Match:** Complete Budget and Match Tables for funding request.
6. **Budget Narrative:** Please be specific regarding how funds will be allocated. Describe source(s) of matching funds and whether cash or in-kind match has been confirmed. Remember, if your proposal involves a chipping, slash removal, cost-share or fuel break program for homeowners, at least a 50% cash match from the property owner or HOA is required. If supporting disadvantaged communities (DACs), a 50% cash match is still required but can be from other local sources. Unless you have a federally Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement or NICRA, you may not take more than a 10% indirect fee. The indirect rate should be a percentage of the project costs, not the maximum award amount. Describe your ability to leverage AIM funds with other funding sources. Because AIM funding is from a federal source, you may **NOT** use federal funds for your match. Additional leveraged federal resources add value but are not necessary to receive this funding. *(1,500 characters)*