

Action, Implementation & Mitigation (AIM) Program

Request for Concept Papers



AIM Grant Request for Concept Paper Instructions

OVERVIEW

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

AIM Awards range from \$10,000 to \$75,000, and run on a 12-month timeline. The anticipated starting date for this current round of funding is May, 2024.

What is the process of applying for an AIM Grant?

The AIM Application process has two stages: a Concept Paper round, and then a Final Application. Once a Concept Paper has been submitted, it will be reviewed by a Review Panel. If selected, that applicant will be provided targeted feedback from the review session, and invited to submit a more comprehensive Final Application. A second Review Panel will determine if the project is then selected for funding.

How are the Review Panels selected?

Concept Paper submissions are reviewed by internal staff, and Final Applications are reviewed by a diverse panel of both internal and external subject matter experts.

Are there opportunities to discuss my proposal?

If you would like to discuss your proposal to see if it meets AIM's objectives, please contact: Mitch Dahlke, Wildfire Mitigation Specialist: (mitch.dahlke@co-co.org | 719-922-1749) or Morgan Cohen, Grants and Contracts Manager: (morgan.cohen@co-co.org | 719-493-3792).

BEFORE YOU BEGIN:

- Read through the entire Request for Concept Paper Instructions and Concept Paper Document before constructing your responses.
- 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 proposal. Please be sure you have answered the questions asked.
- All character limits *include* spaces. Please do not exceed these limits.
- **Priority will be given to proposals that clearly articulate how the organization's capacity will be increased versus proposals that simply treat acres.**

APPLICATION PROCESS

We encourage you to apply as soon as you are able with **the final deadline to submit the Concept Paper on 02/23/24**. Please email your completed proposal to AIM@co-co.org by 5:00PM MT.

If you have technical problems with the application, contact Wendie Warner (wendie.warner@co-co.org | 719-960-6866).

Background

Coalitions & 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 residents and firefighters.

This funding opportunity is open to organizations working to advance wildfire risk reduction. COCO funds place-based, solution-oriented organizations, across the country that focus their work on projects that increase communities' ability to overcome barriers to successful community wildfire mitigation, multiply their efforts, achieve quantifiable outcomes, and support equitable and inclusive programs. In addition to financial assistance, COCO offers mentorship to applicants who are at a tipping point to move their program(s) or organization forward. For additional information regarding our Mitigation Mentors program, please email mitch.dahlke@co-co.org.

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 costs 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 larger wildfire mitigation landscape, and are encouraged to coordinate with government partners on nearby public lands projects.

Homeowner associations, property owner associations, and metro districts are NOT eligible, as this grant targets increasing organizational capacity across broader landscapes, which in turn benefits homeowner and property owner associations throughout the community.

1. Eligible Organizations

Eligible organizations include:

- 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
- Tribal Authorities
- 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.

The Organization must also provide supplemental information indicating eligibility to receive federal funding. On April 4, 2022, the unique entity identifier used across the federal government changed from the DUNS Number to the Unique Entity ID (generated by SAM.gov).

Organizations must have a UEID Number that can be provided at the time of Final Application, and must be listed as Active in SAM.gov, be in compliance with all state and federal regulations, have no existing exclusions and be in good standing. If you require any assistance meeting these eligibility requirements, please contact Morgan Cohen (morgan.cohen@co-co.org).

Previous AIM Awardees:

Previous or current awardees that have not held back-to-back AIM awards are eligible to apply for a consecutive round of funding, and can apply while still working on the existing award if their work is considered substantially completed.

I. Any current funding must be spent in full prior to the new award being made available and a contract or amendment signed.

II. The organization must be in good standing and in compliance with the requirements of the existing agreement, including the submission of the final report.

III. If granted consecutive AIM awards, or the organization has been granted two previous awards in total, two full funding rounds must pass before an organization is again eligible to apply for another AIM Grant. Typically, two funding rounds happen each calendar year.

Applications from previous awardees will be assessed for additional funding based on how well their proposal builds upon the original program of work, supports the expansion of the work, and/or if funding is deemed to be critical to support the organization's ongoing efforts.

If this would be beyond your third Award, please reach out to AIM@co-co.org directly to discuss your eligibility.

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 plans for CWPP development or updates.

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 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 (based on the total award amount).
- COCO may be able to reduce the overall match requirements through the use of a USFS Match Waiver. If you are requesting a match waiver please reach out directly to AIM@co-co.org at least *10 days* before the due date for the Concept Paper submission.

Cost share programs:

- If the application is for a cost-share program where fuel 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, the 50% cash match may be reduced in some cases. However the applicant must still show a 100% match (cash or in-kind) to the total project budget. Additionally, COCO requires applicants to explain the process used to identify underserved, at-risk, and/or disadvantaged populations, using information sourced from a reputable source, an indication of an application process and/or income threshold.
 - Here are a few examples of tools used by COCO, but if your organization does not rank high based on these tools, please explain how you're coming to the conclusion that you're under resourced:
 - <https://screeningtool.geoplatform.gov/en/#3/33.47/-97.5>
 - <https://wildfirerisk.org/cwdg-tool/>

2. AIM Grant Purpose

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

A. Personnel Capacity (Staffing)

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 respond to requests for assistance. 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* (Creating Formalized Plans)

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. In your proposal, don't forget to tell the audience who will lead the implementation effort.*

C. Reduction of Hazardous Fuels

Hazardous fuel reduction / forest management projects should be strategic, executed at an impactful scale, on or adjacent to moderate/high wildfire risk areas near public lands, and 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, as well as 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

Equipment refers to non-expendable personal property with a useful life of more than one year (up to \$5,000 maximum budget line).

If seeking funding for equipment, please describe the following:

- Discuss how you plan to use and maintain the equipment.
- Explain how adding this equipment 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 COCO has 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 for 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 licenses and/or subscriptions for a period longer than one year, and GPS Units under \$5,000/mitigation equipment 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 cost-share projects that reduce 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. ***Applicants must provide two letters of support with your Final 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.). Letters should not be from contractors that you might potentially hire. ***Letters of support are NOT due with your Concept Paper submission, and will only be asked for if you are invited to submit a Final Application.***

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/BIA/Tribal offices. A map showing identified wildfire risk for your project area is also critical and ***is required with your final 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 cost-share program where work is conducted 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. COCO will assist funded organizations in creating a system to manage this documentation if you do not currently have that capability. Volunteer time is calculated according to the national federal volunteer rate, currently \$31.80 per hour for 2022, or the state volunteer rate in which your organization resides (both these rates can be found here: <https://independentsector.org/resource/value-of-volunteer-time/>).

6. Reporting and Monitoring Requirements

Recipients will be required to provide project status updates with each reimbursement request throughout the 12-month life of the grant. Upon completion of the project, recipients must report on final expenses and 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).