# Community Catalyst Fund Request for Applications

## OVERVIEW

Thank you for your interest in the Community Navigator Program Community Catalyst Fund!

The Community Navigator Program is a program funded by the USDA Forest Service and launched in 2023 to support historically underserved communities in finding and accessing federal funding and partnership support. **COCO's Community Catalyst Fund is intended to build community-serving organizational capacity towards climate resilience through access to funding and partnerships with the USDA Forest Service.** Awards range from $10,000-$150,000 and currently run on an 11-month timeline.

**Applications are due June 6, 2024 by midnight Mountain Time Zone.**

**How are Applications reviewed and selected?**
Community Catalyst Fund applications are vetted by Coalitions & Collaboratives staff to ensure applicants meet basic eligibility requirements for receiving federal funding. The grant award selection committee includes the Community Navigator Program Advisory Council, which is composed of professionals who are representative of the communities that the Community Navigator Program serves.

Priority will be given to applications that clearly articulate how the proposed project will increase support for historically underserved communities, as defined by the Community Navigator Program, with efforts that align with Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) and Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) provisions. Furthermore, priority will be given to those applications that clearly define plans to establish longer-term relationships and pathways with the USDA Forest Service for future work.

**Are there opportunities to discuss my application?**
If you would like to discuss your application to see if it meets Community Catalyst Fund objectives, please contact cnpinfo@co-co.org.

**BEFORE YOU BEGIN:**
- Read through the entire Request for Applications Instructions before constructing your responses.
- Read the organizational eligibility and requirements to ensure you are eligible to receive federal funding.

# APPLICATION PROCESS

We encourage you to apply as soon as you are able. **Please email your completed application packet to [cnpinfo@co-co.org](mailto:cnpinfo@co-co.org) by the application deadline: <u>June 6, 2024, by midnight MT</u>.**

## 1. Applicant Eligibility and Requirements

Eligible organizations include the following entities that serve historically underserved communities and whose work involves climate resilience:

- Regional and local collaborative efforts
- Fire Safe Councils and/or Wildfire Councils
- Nonprofit groups
- Fire Departments
- Conservation Districts
- Tribal Authorities
- City or county government
- Universities or Colleges

The community and/or project area must meet criteria for historically underserved communities. Applications that demonstrate meeting multiple criteria defined below will be prioritized. Communities defined as historically underserved as outlined by the Community Navigator Program include:

- Tribal governments and Indigenous communities
- Communities of color
- Communities at high risk of wildfire
- Communities at risk of extreme climate change impact
- Low-income rural communities
- Underserved communities of small acreage forest landowners (<2500)

Organization requirements to apply:

- The Organization must provide proof of eligibility to receive federal funding: **<u>Organizations must have a UEID Number that can be provided at the time of Final Application</u>**, and must be listed as Active in [SAM.gov](http://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 email: [cnpinfo@co-co.org](mailto:cnpinfo@co-co.org).
- A narrative, budget table, and one letter of support must be provided in the proposal packet.
- Applications for funding must lead to a meaningful increase in local capacity to serve historically underserved communities as defined above.
- Be open to guidance from COCO staff on proposed use of funds.
- Be willing to share lessons learned, challenges and successes with COCO's CNP team.
- Comply with all grant reporting requirements and meet project completion milestones and deadlines including outcome monitoring, reporting and a final close-out report.

- The Community Catalyst Fund is a **post-project reimbursement-based grant.** This means that your organization will submit reimbursements after expenses have been incurred. Requests for reimbursement can be submitted up to once per month and will be paid within 60 days after approval.

## 2. Community Catalyst Funding Categories

Project Applications must fit within one or more of the following categories, while demonstrating an overall goal of developing and/or deepening partnership with the USDA Forest Service:

---

**CAPACITY – Training & Development:** Designing training and development initiatives that cater to priority populations and organizations, fostering knowledge, skills, and access to information essential for pursuing opportunities. Examples include training on grants.gov, grant writing, federal funding management, and specific subject matter expertise required for successful award implementation (e.g. Community Wildfire Protection Plan development for the Community Wildfire Defense Grant and other BIL and IRA programs), as well as guidance on metrics and reporting.

If you are requesting funding for training staff, partners, or community leaders, which may include hiring external facilitators to provide training to your staff or enrolling several members of your staff in an external training, please articulate how the training(s) identified will increase your capacity for accomplishing organizational goals towards climate resilience. Possible examples include but are not limited to: training necessary for staff to receive promotions, for your organization to launch a new program or initiative focused on climate resiliency, accessing federal funding, and/or working with the Forest Service.

If you are requesting funding to develop training to deliver to partners, residents and/or stakeholders, articulate why the skills are needed and who the primary audience will be.

**For funding for individual staff members to participate in external training, please see [Community Navigator Scholarship](#) opportunity.**

---

**CAPACITY – Staffing:** Hiring staff positions, contractors, or supporting existing staff that cater to priority populations and organizations. For this funding category capacity must be focused on the following activities:
- Engaging and forming relationships with communities and organizations that have historically been underserved by the USFS. Identifying and prioritizing eligible entities for outreach regarding BIL and IRA program funding opportunities.
- Providing technical assistance and support to individuals, including grant review, assistance with sam.gov registrations, evaluation of organizational policies and procedures, one-on-one coaching, and collaborative brainstorming for program/project development. Providing guidance on navigating BIL and IRA funding opportunities for which they qualify.
- Hiring staff to connect individuals and organizations to federal funding opportunities, programs and resources.

---

**PROGRAM DELIVERY – Piloting new and/or expansion of existing programs:** The main objective of this category is to invest in the delivery of new or expanded initiatives. These initiatives should focus on aiding priority demographics, improving access to federal funding

---

(specifically BIL and IRA), promoting collaboration with federal agencies and partners, building resilience to climate change, and mitigating the risk of natural disasters.

The highest priority within this category is given to programs that lead to effective and actionable outcomes on the ground. However, it's important to note that the emphasis isn't on carrying out on the ground actions but instead providing training, resources, and/or support that enables partners or stakeholders to take action.

*Examples to illustrate:*
   a. *A training program that offers partners training on prescribed fire plan development and/or provides guidance on federal grant compliance and financial management. While the training program itself doesn't conduct prescribed fires, it equips partners with the knowledge and skills needed to carry out these actions effectively, while simultaneously providing career advancement training.*
   b. *Developing navigation programs in the areas you work, connecting communities to resources to access federal funding and partnerships. Help organizations who have received funding through BIL/IRA programs to develop implementation plans, manage projects and grants.*

**KNOWLEDGE AS A TOOL – Collecting stories:** Documenting barriers and challenges helps to better understand the needs of clients. This category includes actively engaging with communities and organizations to gather feedback on their experiences and systematically documenting the barriers and challenges identified through the feedback process. These findings will then be shared with USFS program leads to increase access to resources and support for communities and organizations.

*Example to illustrate: Holding community meetings to gather feedback on the effectiveness of forestry management practices. Meetings would document challenges faced by communities, such as access to resources or communication barriers, and potential mitigations.*

**KNOWLEDGE AS A TOOL - Sharing resources:** Sharing best practices and exchanging resources with partners facilitates continuous learning, fosters innovation, leverages collective strengths, and ultimately drives mutual success.

*Example to illustrate: Opportunities for knowledge exchange events and practices between partners intended to improve program effectiveness.*

Examples of Projects that **DO NOT** qualify for this funding opportunity:
   ● Projects that do not primarily serve one or more of the categories of underserved populations listed
   ● Funding to support grant writing/fundraising
   ● Wildland fire 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)
   ● Capital purchases, including equipment
   ● Land Conservation (purchase, easements, etc.)
   ● Local, state or federal policy development or lobbying
   ● Funding for development, fundraising and/or grant writing
   ● Projects undertaken by and benefiting only one (1) individual property owner

- Projects on federal lands

## 3. Geography

**For projects directly addressing wildland fire risk***: Provide a map (jpg or PDF format) showing identified wildfire risk for your project area *is required with your final application*. Please include a legend. 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.

For all other projects*: Provide a map (jpg or PDF format) showing proposed project focus area, project boundaries or service area.

## 4. Reporting and Monitoring Requirements

Recipients will be required to provide project status updates with each reimbursement request throughout the timeline of the grant: a minimum of 4 status reports and reimbursement requests are required. Not to exceed 12. Upon completion of the project, recipients must submit a close-out report on final expenses and project outcomes resulting from their Community Catalyst Fund award.

The following includes project updates and outcomes expected in reports based on funding categories:

| | |
|---|---|
| **CAPACITY – Training & Development** | # of training participants (staff, partners, community members) |
| | Copies of training materials |
| | Impact stories on how training increases capacity for accomplishing organizational goals towards climate resilience. |
| **CAPACITY – Staffing** | Staff position description(s) and roles. |
| | Events, projects & programs participated in and/or developed. |
| **PROGRAM DELIVERY – Piloting new and/or expansion of existing programs** | Project accomplishments and metrics, e.g. # of training participants; Clients served, communities and/or organizations supported; # of applications submitted, # coaching hours, # post-awardees assisted. |
| | Impact stories of successful BIL/IRA projects implemented (e.g. how the community is impacted, how capacity is increased). |
| **KNOWLEDGE AS A TOOL – Collecting stories** | Documentation of barriers and challenges communities face to successfully compete, receive, and administer federal grants. Include potential mitigations. |
| | # of participants (staff, partners, community members) |
| **KNOWLEDGE AS A TOOL – Sharing resources** | Documentation of best practices and copies of resources shared amongst partners. |

| | # of participants (staff, partners, community members) |
|---|---|
| In all categories: | Timesheets, itemized receipts, documentation of all expenses. |

## 5. Proposal packet

Email your completed proposal packet in PDF format to cnpinfo@co-co.org by the application deadline: June 6, 2024 by midnight MST. Your proposal packet must include all of the following:

- ☐ The **cover page and narrative portion** of the application (prompts on page 7 of RFA) in PDF format. **Your narrative portion is not to exceed 3 pages, 12 font 1 inch margins.**
- ☐ The **budget template** portion of the application. Download the spreadsheet and fill in the budget amounts and narrative. *Reminder that Match is optional for the Community Catalyst Fund, and will have no influence on the eligibility nor selection process.*
- ☐ **One letter of support.** The letter of support should be from a local official or key partner who understands (1) how this funding will benefit your organization and (2) how the project will benefit your community.
- ☐ **A map** showing identified wildfire risk in my project area and/or a map showing proposed project focus area, project boundaries or service area.

# CCF Application Narrative Prompts

Create a cover page that includes the following information:
1. Name and email address of the primary contact for the grant application
2. Your organization's name
3. Your organization's address, including the County and State. (Staff will use this to determine eligibility criteria for communities served.)
4. Your organization's UEID number
5. Project Summary - 1 paragraph which summarizes the project you are proposing.
6. The total amount you are requesting in funding for your organization

The Community Catalyst Fund is intended to support community-serving organizations in meeting goals of climate resiliency. On the following page, include responses to the following narrative prompts. **Your project narrative portion is not to exceed 3 pages, 12 font 1 inch margins.**

PROJECT CATEGORY/-IES
- What category, or categories, does your project fall within:
   A. Capacity - Training and/or Staffing
   B. Program Delivery
   C. Knowledge as a tool - Collecting stories and/ or sharing resources

PROJECT DESCRIPTION
- Describe the need. Please provide a detailed description of the necessity or demand that this project seeks to address. Explain the underlying reasons or challenges that make the project essential, including any existing gaps, problems, or opportunities that need to be addressed.
- What specific project goals do you aim to achieve with the funds you've requested? Please outline the activities, action steps, and deliverables in detail, ensuring that the deliverables are SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-based)

COMMUNITY SERVED
- The Community Catalyst Fund is designed to provide funding to organizations that serve historically underserved communities with efforts that align with Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) and Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) provisions.
- Explain what communities you serve, and why your organization is best suited to serve this community (-ies).

IRA/BIL ALIGNMENT
- Explain how your project aligns with BIL/IRA provision objectives. For resources on BIL: https://www.usda.gov/infrastructure and for resources on IRA: https://www.usda.gov/ira. This could include, but is not limited to, the following:
   ○ Identifying and publicizing funding opportunities,
   ○ Engaging with a wide variety of new and existing USDA Forest Service programs

- ○ Assistance with completing applications
- ○ Assistance with post-award monitoring and financial compliance, and
- ○ Capacity building for long term sustainability in tribal and underserved communities for continued access and benefit from USDA Forest Service programs, services, and funding. Explain how the project will meet your organization's climate resilience goals.

FINANCIAL NEED
- ● Why do you need this funding? Include a narrative explaining the financial need and how the Community Catalyst Fund will build and/or support capacity for climate resilience projects.

STRATEGIC VALUE
- ● What is the strategic value of the project? How will this project increase organizational capacity to meet goals related to building climate resilience?

TIMELINE
- ● What is your project timeline? Outline the proposed timeline for each activity/component of the project, including major milestones that will define project completion. The Community Catalyst Fund currently runs on an 11-month timeline.

MAINTENANCE AND SUSTAINABILITY
- ● Clearly demonstrate how this proposal will remain effective after the closing of your Community Catalyst Fund award by outlining the commitments from partners and/or residents, and potential funding sources (anticipated or committed) that will sustain the project into the future.

# CCF APPLICANT CHECKLIST
Use this checklist to ensure you have submitted all required documents.

☐ I have a Unique Entity Identification (UEID) number set up.
~ Or ~

☐ If my organization does not yet have a UEID number. I have submitted a copy of the email as proof that this process has been initiated, in place of a UEID number.

---

☐ I have read through the complete RFA and understand requirements should my application be awarded:

- ☐ I understand that this is a post-project reimbursement-based grant program.
- ☐ I understand that my organization is required to submit a project report with each reimbursement request.
- ☐ I understand that to accept Community Catalyst Funding, my organization must be deemed eligible to receive federal funds. If my organization is not yet eligible, the Community Navigator Program team will support me and my organization in establishing necessary items so that we meet federal eligibility requirements.
- ☐ I recognize the need to adhere to all Federal, State, and local employment laws, including, but not limited to, the verification of insurance coverages.
- ☐ I understand that my organization will be assigned a Coalitions & Collaboratives Community Navigator when my application is successfully submitted.
- ☐ I acknowledge that my organization may be required to submit certification and copies of internal policies, including procurement, travel, and conflict of interest policies.

☐ **I have submitted my application packet including:**

- ☐ The cover page and narrative portion of the application in PDF format (narrative portion not to exceed 3 pages).
- ☐ The budget template portion of the application.
- ☐ One letter of support.
- ☐ A map (jpg or PDF format) showing identified wildfire risk in my project area and/or a map showing proposed project focus area, project boundaries or service area.

☐ I understand that, should my organization be awarded a Community Catalyst Fund award, I will be required to:

- ☐ Complete and sign an agreement between COCO and the funded organization.
- ☐ Complete and Sign SF424b Assurances, Non-Construction Programs.
  https://www.rd.usda.gov/files/vtnh.RBDG_.SF-424B.16.pdf
- ☐ Complete and Sign FS 1500 / Financial CapabilityChecklist:
  https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/stelprd3834433.docx
- ☐ Provide a current W-9.
- ☐ Provide proof of insurance.