



Collaborative Capacity Program for Forests & Communities REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS - 2024

Key Information

Program Focus: The National Forest Foundation's new Collaborative Capacity Program financial awards will provide resources, invest in skills and tools, and support activities that make Tribal co-stewardship and collaboration for forest stewardship successful. Eligible collaborative efforts must describe how investments in collaboration will support a long-term strategy for achieving stewardship outcomes into the future and these outcomes must seek to benefit National Forest System lands. There are two funding pathways – one for Tribal Applicants and one for All Applicants.

Geographic Restrictions: Proposals will be accepted from throughout the United States and must demonstrate a future benefit to National Forest System lands.

Application Deadline: July 12, 2024, at 11:59 pm MDT.

Funding Type: Federal funds delivered in partnership with the USDA Forest Service.

Eligible Applicant Organizations: Nonprofit organizations, local governmental entities, Tribal governments and organizations, and Tribal and other colleges and universities. If your organization or collaborative group does not meet this eligibility criteria requirement, it must utilize an eligible fiscal sponsor.

Eligible Use of Funds: Funding must support collaboration or collaboration-based activities that aim to benefit National Forest System lands.

Award Amount: From ~\$10k to \$150k per award.

Matching Requirements: Cash and in-kind match are encouraged but not required. Match is not a factor in project evaluation.

Performance Period: Activities funded in this round will begin in early September 2024 and may run for up to two years, through September 2026.

Informational Webinars:

- For All and Tribal Applicants on Wednesday, May 22, 10 – 11:30am (MDT). [Please Register Here.](#)
- For Tribal Applicants on Wednesday, May 29, 12 – 1:30pm (MDT). [Please Register Here.](#)

Applicant Resources:

- [Collaborative Capacity Program for Forests & Communities Webpage](#)
- [Frequently Asked Questions](#)
- [Required Eligibility Quiz](#) for Tribal Applicants and All Applicants

For questions about eligibility, proposal scope, or the application process, please contact Rebecca Brickner at e: collab-capacity@nationalforests.org and p: 360-899-0962.

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General Information

The National Forest Foundation (NFF) is excited to share the 2024 Request for Proposals for funding through the Collaborative Capacity Program (CCP) for Forests & Communities. There are two funding pathways – one for Tribal Applicants and one for All Applicants.

About the National Forest Foundation

The [National Forest Foundation](#) (NFF) inspires all of us to embrace and protect the awe-inspiring natural world. In cooperation with hundreds of partners, we lead natural solutions that protect our people and planet. Through direct fieldwork, facilitation, grant programs, and promotion of responsible recreation, the NFF inspires people to get personally involved in caring for the 193 million acres of public lands that make up our National Forest System.

About the Collaborative Capacity Program for Forests & Communities

The Collaborative Capacity Program for Forests & Communities (CCP) is a new program that builds capacity within and across collaborative groups (see [Program Definitions](#) section) to achieve forest stewardship goals in ways that are most inclusive and equitable. The program views collaboration as a cornerstone for sustained and adaptive forest restoration, recreation, and wildfire resilience projects.

Through funding, technical assistance, and peer networking, the CCP program uses a holistic approach to provide capacity for successful collaboration and to encourage, amplify, and distribute new and innovative practices. The technical assistance and peer networking components of the CCP program are forthcoming and will be announced separately.

The CCP is funded by appropriations to the USDA Forest Service (Forest Service) through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (Section 40803-c-10) to support “collaboration and collaboration-based activities.” The program is developed, executed, and managed by the NFF.

Funding Overview

Forest stewardship is the responsible planning and management of forest ecosystems, watersheds, and surrounding landscapes to ensure their long-term health and productivity. Forest stewardship is also concerned with economic and social wellbeing and emphasizes the important connections between forest ecosystems and people. Collaboration for forest stewardship is a tool for working across land-ownership boundaries to reduce wildfire risk, ensure sustainable recreation and access, and build forests and communities that are resilient to climate change and other stressors. The CCP's financial awards support the critical capacity elements and activities that make Tribal co-stewardship and other collaborative forest stewardship successful.

Collaborative forest stewardship efforts in all stages of their development require capacity support of some kind, and the specific capacity needed will vary depending on the area of focus, existing resources, relationships, and skill sets. For example, these financial awards may assist with startup costs for building new relationships and forming a collaborative in a specific landscape. Alternatively, they may help expand the scale, impact, and inclusivity of existing collaborative efforts.

Eligible collaborative efforts for the CCP's financial awards must describe how investments in collaboration will support a long-term strategy for achieving stewardship outcomes into the future and these outcomes must provide a future benefit to forests and grasslands currently managed by the USDA Forest Service as part of the National Forest System. A few examples of stewardship outcomes include the implementation of restoration plans in post-fire areas, building more accessible trails, or conducting erosion control work to improve stream and watershed health. Work of this type is focused on comparatively longer time horizons to account for the extensive collaborative effort required in advance of project planning or implementation. While CCP's financial awards do not directly support on-the-ground project implementation, the outcomes proposed by applicants must aim to benefit forests and grasslands currently managed by the USDA Forest Service as part of the National Forest System.

In addition to benefiting National Forest System lands, the CCP has three main objectives:

1. **To increase and improve the capacity for collaboration** between Tribes and other strategic partners and the Forest Service to achieve long-term stewardship outcomes that benefit National Forests and Grasslands. This capacity will support equitable and inclusive planning for watershed and/or landscape-scale stewardship projects.
2. **To ensure more inclusive and equitable collaboration** by centering Tribal Nations and historically excluded and underserved communities in their efforts to participate, lead, and design collaborative efforts with the Forest Service and other strategic partners.
3. **To support the exchange of information and amplify lessons and best practices** for equitable and inclusive collaboration, increasing collaborative capacity, storytelling and measuring success, and more, with the broader collaborative stewardship field of practice.

Program Definitions

The CCP operates under the following definitions:

Collaborative forest stewardship is when people with different perspectives work together to find shared solutions to complex forest management challenges, like extreme wildfire, climate change stressors, and concerns about sustainable recreation. This type of collaboration can succeed at multiple levels – from local to national – to build shared understanding and solutions. A variety of support is required to make collaborative forest stewardship successful, like coordination, facilitation, communications, fundraising, training, and more. Collaborative forest stewardship requires partners that come together to transcend individual organizations’ efforts and work collaboratively towards shared goals for forest stewardship. There is no concrete number of partners or perspectives defined for collaboration; however, applicants consisting of only a few partners or perspectives will generally not be competitive in this program.

Collaborative groups consist of multiple partners and interests who work together to identify common ground. They may aim to lead, coordinate, organize, and provide feedback on collaborative forest stewardship projects in a specific place or region. The term “collaborative groups” refers to all partnerships, networks, coalitions, Tribes and other governments, and initiatives working towards shared place-based or regional goals.

Many have observed the lack of meaningful inclusion and genuine engagement with Tribes and underserved communities in the field of collaborative forest stewardship, creating inequities in decision-making and planning for forest stewardship projects. The definition of *collaboration* is evolving and expanding into a broader range of ways of reaching and engaging with people and communities, including those who have been previously excluded from accessing National Forests and the benefits derived from them. For example, through their government-to-government relationships, Tribes are increasingly collaborating with the Forest Service through co-stewardship agreements.¹ Several opportunities exist to collaborate with underserved communities through natural resources projects as well as sustainable recreation and cultural heritage projects. The CCP uses the definitions of equity and underserved communities cited in the Forest Service’s Equity Action Plan²:

Equity is the consistent and systematic fair, just, and impartial treatment of all individuals, including individuals who belong to underserved communities that have been denied such treatment, such as Black, Latino, and Indigenous and Native American persons; Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and other persons of color; members of religious minorities; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) persons; persons with disabilities; persons who live in rural areas; and persons otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty or inequality.

¹ [Annual Report on Co-Stewardship USDA](#) (2022)

² [Forest Service Equity Action Plan](#) (2022)

Underserved communities are populations sharing a particular characteristic, as well as geographic communities, that have been systematically denied a full opportunity to participate in aspects of economic, social, and civic life.

The **National Forest System** includes the public lands managed by the Forest Service, including forests, grasslands, and related lands throughout the United States and its territories. [Click here](#) to view a map of National Forest System lands.

Funding Pathways and Eligible Organizations

The CCP provides two funding pathways – one for Tribal Applicants and one for All Applicants. Please carefully read the information below on the eligibility differences of each pathway.

Tribal Applicants Pathway

Tribes have been careful stewards of forests since time immemorial. The NFF acknowledges the unique and diverse perspectives of the 574 federally recognized Tribes and Alaska Native Villages, and the many other state and non-recognized Tribes. This pathway specifically applies to federally recognized Tribal applicants; however, state and non-recognized Tribes may be eligible to apply through the [All Applicants Pathway](#).

There are several ways that federally recognized Tribes engage with the Forest Service, including government-to-government consultation, collaboration, or even formal agreements, such as co-stewardship agreements. The Forest Service's Tribal Action Plan³ directly states how Tribal sovereignty, in relation to public lands management and National Forests, entails the recognition of Tribal Nations and their rights to participate in decision-making processes regarding lands that hold cultural, historical, and spiritual significance to them.

Eligibility for Tribal Applicant Pathway:

1. **Organization Type:** Applications for the Tribal Applicant pathway will be considered from federally recognized Tribal governments⁴ and Tribal organizations.⁵

³ [Forest Service Tribal Action Plan](#) (2023)

⁴ A "federally recognized Tribe" refers to any Indian or Alaska Native Tribe, Band, Nation, Pueblo, Village, or other community included on a list published by the Secretary of the Interior pursuant to section 104 of the Federally Recognized Indian Tribe List Act of 1994 (25 U.S.C. 479a-1; see also Executive Order 13175, sec. 1(b)). The most current list of the 574 Federally-recognized Tribes was published on 1/8/2024 in the Federal Register and can be accessed here: [Federal Register: Indian Entities Recognized by and Eligible To Receive Services From the United States Bureau of Indian Affairs](#).

⁵ The definition of "Tribal organization" found at 25 U.S. C. § 5304 (l) under the [Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act](#) (Public Law 93-638). "Tribal organization" means the recognized governing body of any Indian tribe; any legally established organization of Indians which is controlled, sanctioned, or chartered by such governing body or which is democratically elected by the adult members of the Indian community to be served by such organization and which includes the maximum participation of Indians in all phases of its activities.

2. **Tribal Resolution or Letter of Support:** All proposals to this pathway must include a letter of support from Tribal leadership (e.g., Tribal Council, Tribal department staff) with application materials and, if awarded, a Tribal resolution. Please reach out to the NFF with any questions related to letters of support.

All Applicants Pathway

This funding pathway is designed to support all other applicants. This funding pathway focuses on adding capacity where it is missing and supporting collaborative groups in evolving to take on more intersectional approaches.

Eligibility for All Applicants Pathway:

1. **Organization Type:** Applications to this funding pathway will be considered from nonprofit organizations, local governmental entities, state-recognized Tribal governments, and colleges and universities. If your organization or collaborative group does not meet this eligibility criteria requirement, it must utilize an eligible fiscal sponsor. For more information, see the section on [Fiscal Sponsorship](#).
2. **Letters of Support from the Forest Service:** See [Guidance on Forest Service Letters of Support](#). Please contact the NFF with any questions related to Forest Service support letters. NOTE: If an applicant includes a Tribe(s) or Tribal organization(s) in the collaborative proposal, applications must include signed letters of support from the partnering entity and/or a Tribal resolution(s) from a partnering Tribe.

Fiscal Sponsorship

If your organization or collaborative group does not meet the organization eligibility criteria above, it must utilize a fiscal sponsor that is an eligible type of organization and consistent with the [NFF Policy on Fiscal Sponsorship](#). A fiscal sponsor is an organization that offers their legal status to accept funds on behalf of a partner organization – or partners – that do not have the same organizational status. The IRS considers fiscal sponsors and sponsored organizations or partners to be the same entity, so both parties should be aligned in their purpose and mission. Fiscal sponsors are legally responsible for the financial award and will be responsible for dispersing the financial awards to the sponsored organization(s) or partners. Please contact the NFF with questions about an organization's eligibility or questions about using or finding a fiscal sponsor.

Funding Details

The following funding details apply to both Tribal and All Applicants. This is a new program and funding details may change in future rounds. Applications that demonstrate a financial need will be prioritized for this round of funding.

Eligible Use of Funds

Successful applicants will demonstrate how collaborative elements and activities will lead to stewardship benefit(s) to National Forest Systems lands. The types of collaborative capacity elements and activities supported through financial awards may include, but are not limited to:

- **Collaborative capacity elements**
 - Dedicated staff or contractors for coordination and facilitation support
 - Dedicated staff or contractors for writing and managing co-stewardship agreements (federally recognized Tribal applicants only)
 - Communications and data sharing systems (e.g., developing an internal database or external website)
 - Skill-building and workshops
 - Stipends or honoraria for equitable participation in collaborative efforts

- **Collaborative activities**
 - Costs associated with the design of strong and equitable governance models
 - Costs associated with relationship-building with new audiences and deepening relationships with existing audiences
 - Inclusive public engagement and outreach activities
 - Travel related to collaborative group activities, meeting and convening costs
 - Costs related to the development of action plans, strategic planning documents, and other shared strategy materials
 - Technical services that meet project and program-specific needs (e.g., GIS support for project planning)
 - Costs related to collaborative or partnership assessments

Ineligible Use of Funds

CCP's financial awards may not support on-the-ground project implementation. This includes but is not limited to activities like restoration treatments, trail maintenance, invasive species control, and/or hazardous fuels reduction. Additionally, funds may not be used for any advocacy, litigation, or political organizing.

Budget and Match Requirements

- Proposals to the CCP may range from ~\$10k to a maximum of \$150k
- Proposals requesting \$50k and above must include additional narrative and budget detail
- Cash and in-kind match are encouraged, especially with requests over \$50k, in 2024 funding round
- Match is not a factor in project evaluation

Funding Rounds and Designations

The CCP intends to host three annual funding rounds from 2024 through 2026. The total CCP funding amount for the three rounds is \$2.5 million, with 25% targeted for recipients in Forest Service Region 6 (Oregon and Washington), including Tribal or All Applicants. Additionally, at least 25% of the total program amount is targeted for federally recognized Tribes. Recipients of funding in 2024 or 2025 may reapply to the program after their initial award is closed.

Performance Period

Financial assistance awards funded in the 2024 funding round will begin in early September 2024. Applicants may select the duration of the award, which may run for up to two years through 2026.

Application Review Process

A review committee of NFF staff, Forest Service staff, and external reviewers relevant to the program priorities and communities will review proposals and make funding recommendations. The application review process is expected to be completed within two months of the application deadline.

Evaluation Criteria

Each member of the review committee will evaluate applications based on the following equally weighted criteria.

Strength of Engagement and Collaborative Process

In this group of evaluation criteria, reviewers are asked to consider the engagement and collaborative activities proposed:

- The extent to which the proposed work will strengthen or create relationships between strategic partners.
- The extent to which the proposal demonstrates a commitment to equitable decision-making and inclusive collaborative processes.
- The extent to which the proposal demonstrates a need for collaborative capacity elements and activities.

Strength and Diversity of Involvement in the Collaborative Effort

In this group of evaluation criteria, reviewers are asked to consider the existing and intended participants in the collaborative effort and the degree to which they are involved.

- The extent to which the applicant demonstrates meaningful awareness of ecological, cultural, traditional, and/or social information and how it influences new and existing collaborative efforts.
- The extent to which the proposed activities will support meaningful involvement and voice of geographically relevant underserved communities.
- The extent to which the proposed activities will support meaningful involvement and voice of geographically relevant Tribes and Indigenous communities.

Feasibility and Strength of Proposal

In this group of evaluation criteria, reviewers are asked to consider the planning aspects of the proposal and whether it is responsive to the stated needs:

- The extent to which the proposed goals and objectives are consistent with the identified needs.
- The extent to which the activities contribute to a long-term strategy.
- The extent to which the means of evaluating and monitoring progress are well defined and appropriate for the stated goals.
- The likelihood the applicant will complete activities within the proposed award period.
- The extent to which the budget is reasonable given the proposed activities.

How to Apply

Applicants complete and submit applications through an online application platform and start with an [eligibility quiz](#). Refer to this RFP document and the following resources as you complete the online form.

Application Components

- **For all requests**
 - Brief narrative of context, goals, activities, and proposed outcomes/evaluation
 - Budget (category-level only) and budget narrative
 - Information about the applicant and organizational history
 - **For Tribal Applicants pathway**
 - Letter of support from Tribal leadership (e.g., Tribal Council, Tribal department staff) with application materials; if awarded, a Tribal resolution is also required. Please reach out to the NFF with any questions related to letters of support.
 - **For All Applicants pathway**
 - Letter of support from Forest Service
NOTE: If an applicant includes a Tribe(s) or Tribal organization(s) in the collaborative proposal, applications must include signed letters of support from the partnering entity and/or a Tribal resolution(s) from a partnering Tribe.
- **Requests of \$50k and above must also provide**
 - Multi-year, line-item budget details
 - Additional narrative

Reporting Requirements

- Update Report*
 - Completed every six months.
 - These reports include a financial status report, plus a brief descriptive report on activities completed. This brief report on activities completed can be in written form or through an interview.

- Final Report*
 - Completed at the end of the performance period.
 - This final report includes a written financial report plus a written narrative describing the activities completed. Final report narratives may also include video, photo essay, story map, or media.

*No sensitive information (e.g., proprietary Tribal data, Indigenous Tribal Ecological Knowledge or “ITEK,” or any other information deemed sensitive by the Tribal applicant) is necessary for the application. The applicant may withhold sensitive Tribal data and information (e.g., proprietary Tribal data, ITEK) may be excluded/redacted from all project deliverables to ensure protection. The NFF will work with the Grantee to ensure a clear process for excluding sensitive Tribal data in the Grant Agreement. For example, maps (if necessary) may be an approximation in the case that resource location is considered sensitive information.

Applicant Resources

Frequently Asked Questions

The NFF has established a page for [frequently asked questions](#). It will be updated regularly over the course of the program.

Informational Webinars

Two informational webinars regarding proposal requirements and the submission process will be provided at the dates and times below. Both webinars will be recorded and posted on the [Collaborative Capacity Program for Forests & Communities Webpage](#).

- For All and Tribal Applicants on Wednesday, May 22, 10 – 11:30am (MDT). [Please Register Here.](#)
- For Tribal Applicants on Wednesday, May 29, 12 – 1:30pm (MDT). [Please Register Here.](#)

How to Start a New Application

Every applicant must complete an eligibility quiz to ensure their proposed activities and organization are eligible to receive funding. Upon successful completion of the eligibility quiz, you will receive an email with an access code and instructions that will allow you to initiate an application.

For Tribal Applicants, [use this link](#) to complete an approximately 10-question quiz that ensures the proposed activities and organization are eligible to receive funding.

For All Applicants, [use this link](#) to complete an approximately 10-question quiz that ensures the proposed activities and organization are eligible to receive funding.

How to Return to the Application You Started

If you have already completed the eligibility quiz and initiated an application, you can return to the application form by following these steps:

1. Go to the application login page at <https://www.grantinterface.com/Home/Logon?urlkey=nationalforests>
2. Log in with your existing account
3. Click "Edit Application" to the right of the name of your saved application

Proposal Attachment Forms

The NFF regularly updates its standard forms and applicants must download and use the current forms each grant round. Do not re-use NFF forms saved on your computer from previous rounds.

- [NFF Master Financial Plan form](#)
- [NFF Expanded Budget form](#)

Policies and Documents

Prior to developing a CCP application, applicants should review and understand this RFP and the following policies:

- [NFF Indirect Cost Rate Policy](#)
- [NFF Policy on Fiscal Sponsorship](#) (if applicable)

Additional guidance on how to complete the NFF CCP application and budget forms are provided in these documents:

- [How to Complete the NFF Master Financial Plan](#) – This document covers definitions of expense categories and match sources and provides detailed examples of both the Master Financial Plan and Expanded Budget forms.
- [Guidance on Forest Service Letters of Support](#) – This document provides guidance on obtaining a US Forest Service Letter of Support.

Additional Questions and Program Contact

NFF Conservation Awards staff are available to answer questions about eligibility, project scope, or the application process. If you have read through the resources listed above and have additional questions about CCP or the grant application process, contact NFF staff for guidance.

Requesting and receiving help will not affect an organization's competitiveness for the program.

For questions about eligibility, project scope, or the application process, please contact Rebecca Brickner at e: collab-capacity@nationalforests.org and p: 360-899-0962.