

# Community Wildfire Defense Grant

## Frequently Asked Questions

*Updated: September 20, 2022*

### Definitions:

Q: Formal definition for "underserved"?

A: Definition that will be utilized for the CWDG program to determine eligibility for cost-share waiver:

- A community meets the threshold of vulnerable with a score of 0.75 or above on the CDC Social Vulnerability Index, as compared to the nation, or meets the low-income descriptions we provide.
- To determine if your project qualifies for this cost-sharing requirement, please use CDC's Social Vulnerability Index for 2018, with tracts compared to the nation.
- As a reference, Executive Order 13985: "Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government": The term "underserved communities" refers to 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.

Q: How do you define a low-income community? Is that through the US census?

A: Definition that will be utilized for the CWDG program:

- For purposes of this program, a low-income community is defined as a community where the relevant counties (i.e., the counties in which the community is located) have a median household income of less than 80% of the median household income of the relevant state(s).
- The approved definition is listed in each NOFO.
- Tools and information will also be available on the CWDG website.

Q: Does the "severe disaster" need to be a wildfire or related?

A: One that increases wildfire risk and hazard. Not just wildfire- but must impact the wildfire risk and hazard.

Q: Does wildfire hazard potential, mean the occurrence or re-occurrence of wildfire, or can other metrics be used to qualify "potential"

A: There will be some tools available to evaluate/establish Wildfire Hazard Potential, but we also recognize that there are some regional and state-specific tools and data that could also be

utilized to establish whether a community is at high or very high wildfire hazard potential, and those tolls or data sets could also be used to determine/establish WF Haz Potential. So, documentation will need to be provided, but there is some flexibility for what source is utilized for that documentation.

## Eligibility:

Q: If the CWPP project states helping homeowners in a community. Can CWDG funds be used to distribute to homeowners in the form of cash/vouchers/coupons/microgrants? Or to reimburse homeowners for projects done?

A: No. They cannot be paid for the work that they are doing, but a contractor could certainly be hired to perform work in a community. The homeowners are beneficiaries of the work being performed and cannot be paid for improvement work on their own property.

Q: How much detail must be in a CWPP?

A: The intent of the workgroup has been more of the logical link, realizing CWPPs were not built with the intention of applying for CWDG grants, nor do we want to spend all of the money just rewriting plans so they can add a lot of detail about projects. There have been two things we have said when trying to determine sufficient detail. One, could a person read the project and develop at least a rough scope of work and budget? If not, that may be a sign there isn't sufficient detail. The other thing is whether the CWPP explains the "how" of a project. If it identifies the area and what needs to be done but doesn't say how it should be done, that may be another sign.

Applicants should be able to provide a direct reference to the part/section of the CWPP that their proposed project is tied to and can be logically linked. For example, if the CWPP has identified needs for home mitigation, then a logically linked project would lead to home mitigation (e.g. – chipper for community chipping days, chainsaw training for homeowners, etc.).

Q: CWPP clarification - If part or only an exact location is a high risk of wildfire, but the rest of the community is not, would the community as a whole be eligible as high risk?

A: It sounds like this is regarding "high or very high wildfire hazard potential," and the scoring rubric states it would meet that requirement if "All, or part of the project is located within an area of high or very high wildfire hazard potential, and is properly documented."

Q: If an HOA cannot handle funds, would a fiscal sponsor be able to be the lead applicant?

A: Yes, as long as the other entity meets the eligibility requirements to be able to serve as the Lead Agency or Organization for that application, it would be acceptable.

Q: Is a 501(c)12 eligible for CWDG?

A: 501(c)12's are cooperatives and are considered non-profit; therefore, they are eligible.

Q: How to handle indirect rates that will be taken off sub-awards in opt-in states?

A: This additional funding will be calculated in addition to the application, and will be sent to the state with the sub-award. That way, a state will not need to use base funding, nor will an applicant need to account for this when figuring out their budget. When a project is awarded, we will add the state's indirect (NICRA or *de minimus*) on as additional.

Q: Are Electric Coops eligible?

A: No information was found that they are handled differently; it just depends on how they are registered. So, if they are registered as a non-profit, they are eligible for funding through CWDG.

Q: Underserved match waiver ability for projects spanning community boundaries?

A: If a project spans a boundary of two communities, and one community meets the definition of underserved, but the other doesn't, it will depend on whether the project is truly connected and necessary to protect the underserved community. If it is, it will be handled like the three priorities, in that the entire project will receive the benefit. The important part is to explain how the part of the project in the community that doesn't meet the underserved definition actually benefits the underserved community. It will likely be obvious if a wealthier community is including a portion of their project in an underserved community just to try and claim that benefit, versus an underserved community having to do work in a neighboring wealthier community.

Q: With the time frame, if they apply next year or the next, will it go the full five years out from the time of application rather than the beginning of the Notice of funding this year?

A: The 5-year clock will begin with the Start Date of the grant award (if the applicant requests the full 5 years)

Q: CWPP must be 5 years or older to be eligible for CWDG funding to update the CWPP, correct?

A: Yes - this is correct for CWPP updates.

Q: Can Nonprofit agencies like TNC apply?

A: Non-profit organizations, including homeowner associations that assist such communities.

Q: Will there be a match waiver for the islands?

A: The normal match waiver applicable for the Pacific Islands (up to \$500,000) applies. The only other waiver allowable is for underserved communities. Otherwise 10% for CWPP development/update or 25% for implementation projects.

Q: Will the purchase of equipment follow the same guidelines as currently in place for other federal grants (e.g., SFA)?

A: All of the usual administrative requirements related to federal grants will apply to equipment. However, the intent of CWDG will be for carrying out projects identified in a CWP, so equipment will need to be related to carrying out those projects, and this will be spelled out more clearly in CWDG Guidance, which is also under review and pending approval.

Q: For disaster points, is it a declared natural disaster, and if so, at what level, local, state, or presidential? What sources would verify if the disaster is not a declared disaster?

A: This program is intended to be flexible, so scale could be any of those you mention. If it's not declared, the applicant would need to provide documentation from a government authority having jurisdiction. As an example, a severe insect outbreak causing considerable mortality and thereby increasing hazard may be something from the State Forester stating such and why it would constitute a severe disaster. The key is a disaster that had an impact on fire risk/hazard.

Q: Our CWPPs have a timeframe (for example, 2010-2015), but some of them haven't been updated recently. Would the 10 years start at the beginning or end of the timeframe (e.g., 2010 or 2015)?

A: The statute says not older than 10 years old versus 10 years since expiration, so it would be the 2010 date. Therefore, in that example, that CWPP would be okay up until 2020.

Q: Can a Firewise site (homeowner association) that is within a CWPP boundary apply for funds?

A: Yes, as long as the application is for a project that can be identified within a CWPP that is not more than 10 years old.

Q: Are vehicles (pickups) an "Eligible Expense" for CWDG Projects?

A: Yes, though it must be fully dedicated to CWDG. Other options to consider could be leasing vehicles for specific needs.

Q: If states have adopted international building codes of 2022, would that be applicable?

A: Depends - if there is a state law that says a community can have something more strict, but this is a minimum, then that would work. A state can reference having codes or something similar - this is quite a broad requirement.

Part 2: Building codes vs. Roofing codes: Roofing deals with pots of money (per law); Building codes are for extra points under the sustainability section (per administration initiative). This will be clarified in the NOFO.

Q: About the base funding -- do applications need to be submitted, when will they be received, can the funds be passed through or used for contractors, and do funds need to be spent in the first year?

A: Funds can be rolled over - five years total. Project funds can be used for contractors. Base funds can be too, states just need to be clear that the contractor is involved in program admin. Applications - once NOFO is finished and published - applications will be able to be submitted.

Q: So if a state is managing the entire program, and one of the grants secures equipment, what will be the state's role in following up on that equipment?

A: State will have to require the sub-recipient to report on the pick-up truck every two years and will have to keep track of it until the fair market value is below \$5,000. They don't have to submit this info to USFS, but they must keep it on hand for review.

Q: Is pre-approval needed for equipment purchases?

A: Pre-approval before applying for the grant is not required. If an applicant is successful, they will need to obtain approval prior to award by filling out the equipment justification form, but not prior to submitting an application that requests equipment.

Q: Can this opportunity be applied for to update an outdated CWPP, or would the community have to pay to update the plan first, then they could apply for CWDG funds for project work outlined in the CWPP?

A: Yes, funding can be applied to update the CWPP as long as CWPP is older than 5 years old. Have to for any CWPPs older than 10 years old to then apply for project funding.

Q: Does a severe disaster need a certain declaration...federal or state Governor declared?

A: Flexible - must be declared by a government authority having jurisdiction. Legislation doesn't define what a severe disaster means. Something with scale and scope and impacts wildfire risk and hazard. A severe snowstorm, for example, that doesn't impact wildfire risk wouldn't apply. But an insect infestation that has increased risk would qualify. Need something from a government that states that the situation is of a scope and scale that wildfire risk is negatively impacted. (i.e., a gray area is allowed, it just must be well documented.)

Q: Narrative or (National Fire Plan Operations and Reporting System) NFORS for base funding?

A: Performance reporting - annual performance reporting, quarterly financial reporting. Initial grant application - needs narrative (regular grant narrative)

Q: How detailed do projects have to be in the CWPP to be eligible for funding?

A: Fairly detailed - hard to be definitive, but be cautious about overly broad information.

Q: Do we have a standardized CWPP template that communities can go by?

A: The CWDG Program is not establishing any new or required templates for CWPPs. There are several quality guides for developing CWPPs that already exist, and many states have developed their own guidance, and any such state-established guidance would be appropriate to utilize.

Q: Are public and/or state institutions eligible to apply?

A: Yes

Q: Can a county apply?

A: Yes

Q: Is there a match for states that opt-out with a 50K base to educate communities about the program?

A: All base funding requires a 10% match. This is present within the legislation and is thus not waivable

## Purchase/Project Specific Questions:

Q: Are fire or dry hydrants allowed to be purchased through CWDG?

A: Dry hydrants and cisterns yes; pressurized hydrant and water systems No.

Q: If a community has no cell towers and is in need of a system to alert homeowners, would sirens be an allowable purchase/project?

A: The yet-to-be developed Reverse 911 grant system that hopefully will be up and running sometime in the first half of 2023, which will deal specifically with alerting so people can evacuate, etc. While the siren may be eligible under CWDG, the Reverse 911 system is something that community will probably want to keep an eye on as well because that will be more focused on the alerting issue.

Q: Can bio char, or slash kilns, both permanent or portable, be an allowable purchase?

A: Air curtain and trench burners are listed as eligible purchases. Not knowing exactly what they are it may be worth the applicant sending in a picture or website link of what they're looking to purchase. The intent was a means of disposal of brush and fuels in areas where you may not be able (or safe) to do prescribed burning or dispose of brush by other means.

## Portal/ Applications:

Q: Do all subgrantees and subcontractors of a lead recipient also need to register on Sam.gov?

A: They are NOT required to register in sam.gov however they do need to have a UEI assigned through sam.gov. That allows the state, or pass through, to validate that they are indeed eligible to receive Federal funding and have not been debarred or suspended.

Q: Can advanced funds be requested?

A: All FS grants can be handled on either a reimbursable basis or an advance payment basis. For states that opted out or partially opted-in, the FS can do advances. For states that have opted-in but have applicants requesting advances, they should work with their regional FS coop fire staff to determine the best method for moving forward. In some cases, that may mean the FS handles those grants, while in other situations, the FS can advance funds to the state so that they then have them for the community. This will likely be decided on a state-by-state basis depending on policies/ laws, etc. of that particular opt-in state.

Q: States don't get to filter projects. The ranking does this. Correct?

A: Yes

Q: Since our state is fully opting-in, can we still apply for grants through grants.gov?

A: As a fully opt-in state, you would be in charge of helping all applicants within your state from the application submission all the way through sub-granting to the entities and all accompanying requirements. You may still apply for projects yourself as a state forestry agency. You will be

precluded from scoring any applications from your own state to ensure fairness in not scoring your own application.

Q: DUNS# has been replaced with UEI#, correct? Will that be changed on the application?

A: Yes, that is correct.

Q: Can a community submit an application for multiple projects that are all within their own community and listed in their CWPP? For example, chipping days, educational mailings, right-of-way fuels reduction, and home ignition zone assessments - all in one application.

A: Yes

### Western Region Specific (forestrygrants.org):

Q: When eligible entities submit a project proposal and that project is funded, must the entity that applies also be the subrecipient funds are passed to? (NM is an opt-in state with state procurement regulations that make it difficult to procure NGOs unless we have several months to do so before the official application deadline)

A: If a project is selected for funding, the entity that applies would be the entity receiving the funding. In opt-out states, the funding would be delivered through direct grants with the USFS. In opt-in states, the funding would go to the state and then be sub-awarded to the entities within the state that were selected for funding. For NM, if sub-awards are not possible, it would be worth exploring one of two options: 1) change status to opt out with base (at least for year 1 - possibly not necessary for future years as there may be more notice time available to achieve the NM requirements), or 2) connect with USFS Region 3 to determine if there is a way to share the granting responsibilities in a way that accommodates the NM procurement regulations while maintaining the spirit of NM handling the opt-in responsibilities.

Q: Regarding the ask for lead agency information on an application: in the case of a state being partially opted in, can the eligible entity applying independently for a grant (county, city, etc.) be the primary agency contact on an application? or does the state agency still have to be the contact? The way it was described a few slides back made it seem like regardless of who is applying, the state has to be the main contact.

A: For the western application, there will be 2 contact sections. Applicant section and cooperator section. For communities that are implementing their own projects, these will be the same. For a state agency or NGO that is taking on implementation, they would put their info in the applicant section, and the community contact would go in the cooperator section. A good way to remember this: Cooperator = Community Contact; Applicant = All the implementing

### Review Process:

Q: How are the eligible applicants within a "community" prioritized to receive funding? For example, what if 4 entities each apply for \$10 million in the same community? Does the funding just go to the highest-ranked application?

A: Each application will be reviewed and scored separately, and there will be a national list of ranked and approved applications/projects. There will not be "competing," or overlapping applications for similar work in communities, and communities will hopefully work with relevant state and local partners, collaborative groups, and NGOs to prepare applications.

Q: How will regional review panels be assembled and led?

A: The regional state forestry organizations will be helping assemble regional review panels, with the exception of Tribes applications, which will be a review panel that the Forest Service will assemble, with support, input, and involvement from Tribes.

Q: When can successful applicants expect to be notified of funding? Also, when should they plan the start of their projects for project timelines?

A: End of 2022 most likely for lists. Several months into the new year, most likely for funding delivery/project starts.

Q: When is the determination of application eligibility going to be decided, and is this outside the burden of commitment to the regional scoring team?

A: Verification for eligibility and the scoring priorities will be handled separately from the scoring and ranking process for individual applications/projects. There will be separate training and tools available to support verification of eligibility and scoring priorities.

Q: When a state provides a scoring/ranking team rep to serve on the regional scoring team, will that same individual be expected to participate in the verification of eligibility process?

A: We are currently working with the Workgroup to set up a two-tier system, the first would be a verification process, and the second would be the actual reviewing and scoring. The thought being it would be overly burdensome to ask state review panel members to verify everything in an application. Exactly who will be doing the verification is yet to be determined.

## Reporting:

Q: Is CWDG going to follow the federal fiscal year for the quarterly reporting?

A: Federal reporting requirements are based on the calendar year. Quarterly reports are due 30 days after the end of the reporting period: March 31, June 30, September 30, and December 31. Annual reports are due 120 days after the year-end – December 31

Q: If a piece of equipment is purchased with non-federal funds and used as a match for a CWDG grant, does it need to be tracked as though the equipment had been purchased with federal funds?



A: No. But, it must be used for the purpose that it was purchase for, for the life of the grant. So if you bought a trailer with matching funds to haul a skid steer, it's dedicated to that work, not a multi-purpose trailer for every community need.