



## MID-CAPACITY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM *Request for Proposals*

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The National Forest Foundation (NFF), chartered by Congress, engages America in community-based and national programs that promote the health and public enjoyment of the 193-million-acre National Forest System, and administers private gifts of funds and land for the benefit of the National Forests. The NFF believes that communities should play a significant role in determining the future of our National Forests and Grasslands.

### *Overview*

Population growth, failing timber economies and rural/urban migration patterns are significantly impacting the landscape around us. Rural, land-based communities are facing unprecedented challenges and many are recognizing the connections between the health of their local natural resources, communities and economies. At the same time, natural resource issues can be contentious and heated, typified by distrust and deadlock. The National Forest Foundation and many others believe that one way to move past the controversy is to engage communities in dialogue-based, collaborative processes to find common ground and develop proactive solutions.

With Ford Foundation support, the NFF has established the Mid-Capacity Assistance Program (Mid-Capacity) for *community-based organizations and collaborative groups* working on natural resource issues on National Forests and Grasslands. Its purpose is to support relatively young nonprofit organizations as they leverage their initial project successes and experiences, while strengthening their operating infrastructure.

The Mid-Capacity Assistance Program complements and adds to the NFF's "continuum of assistance" spanning from the Community Assistance Program (CAP), which enables newly forming collaborative groups to take the first steps toward becoming working organizations, to the Collaboration Support Program, which supports existing collaborative groups to innovate and move the field of collaboration forward.

The NFF continuum of assistance is completed with our matching grant programs: the Matching Awards Program, Wilderness Stewardship Challenge Program and Ski Conservation Fund. These programs provide matching grants for on-the-ground projects focused on community forestry, watershed restoration, wildlife habitat or recreation. The Mid-Capacity Assistance Program is intended for those organizations that find themselves in between the start-up and full-capacity implementation phases.

The NFF Mid-Capacity Assistance Program provides awards for up to two years, with the second year's funding contingent upon the organization demonstrating significant progress toward stated measurable outcomes during year one. Awards are for \$35,000/year and require

an annual match of \$10,000. In their efforts to build ecological, social and economic sustainability, Mid-Capacity grantees are expected to continue their on-the-ground conservation work and produce measurable results for their organization, the community, natural resources, and the local economy. In addition to award funds, general technical assistance will be provided throughout the grant period (see Program Resources below).

Organizations working with underserved and culturally diverse communities that have limited access to financial and organizational resources are encouraged to apply.

### ***Integrated Conservation Project***

In our effort to help build the capacity of community-based organizations to implement conservation projects on-the-ground for the benefit of their communities, environment and economies, grantees of the Mid-Capacity Assistance Program are required to implement a conservation project as part of their award. Similar to the Matching Awards Program, the NFF looks for projects that will result in tangible benefit to National Forests or Grasslands and involve the surrounding community in the design and/or implementation. More information on the NFF's work and values can be found on our Web site at [www.nationalforests.org](http://www.nationalforests.org).

The NFF does not typically fund educational activities, capital improvements, kiosks, signage or research.

### ***Who Can Apply***

The NFF will accept applications from community-based nonprofit organizations and collaborative groups according to the following definitions:

**Community-based nonprofit organizations** are entities that have a nonprofit tax-exempt status (generally 501(c)(3)), a board of directors, staff, and programs, although some community-based organizations run on volunteers with very few staff members. These organizations implement projects in the community on their own, through collaborative efforts, or in partnership with other entities, including businesses and county, state, and federal agencies.

**Collaborative groups** 1) are comprised of diverse interests that may represent local, regional, national, and other interests; 2) agree to work together to identify common ground; and 3) agree to advance solutions based on that common ground. Many collaborative groups work out agreements through project development, design, implementation, and monitoring; others simply develop and advance recommendations; and others may do a hybrid of both. If a collaborative group does not have 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status, it must utilize a fiscal sponsor with that status.

In addition, the applicant must be:

- An established organization that has moved beyond the initial founding stage and is in the process of stabilizing its organization and strengthening its programs;
- A collaborative organization, or an organization implementing a collaborative project or process;
- Working to develop solutions for sustainable management or restoration on and around National Forests and Grasslands that lead to on-the-ground work; specific issues should be related to community-based forest stewardship, recreation, watershed restoration, and/or wildlife habitat;
- Incorporated as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit or a Native American tribe (If your organization utilizes a fiscal sponsor and you still believe your organization is mid-capacity, you will need to justify your organization's reasons for not incorporating);
- Seeking to build local ecological, social and economic sustainability; and
- Implementing action-oriented, on-the-ground conservation or citizen-based monitoring projects on or around National Forests or Grasslands.

Who Should *Not* Apply:

- Newly formed organizations;
- Fire-safe councils;
- Federal agencies;
- State or local governmental entities;
- Organizations seeking funding for litigation or advocacy; and
- Organizations currently receiving capacity-building funds through the NFF Community Assistance Program or Collaboration Support Program.

### ***Selection Criteria***

Evaluation will be based on answers to the narrative questions provided at the end of this document and the extent to which the collaborative has the following in place:

- Incorporation as a 501(c)(3) (see above, *Who Can Apply*, for further explanation) and have a Board, Executive Director, and possibly additional staff;
- Demonstrated capacity and track record of fundraising from more than one source;
- A vision, mission statement and an identified strategy for working toward that mission, including outcomes. The organization may also have a series of criteria it uses to assess new opportunities and their "fit" within the organizational strategy and mission (In other words, how does your organization know when to say "no"?);
- A framework or approach that incorporates the three elements of ecology, economy and social capacity. By integrating ecological, social and economic strategies into a cohesive approach to land management issues, community-based approaches give local residents both the opportunity and the responsibility to manage their natural resources effectively and to enjoy the benefits of doing so. The NFF recognizes that not all organizations are

able to pursue these three elements equally and that one may be more central than the others *at this point in time*. However, the organization must have all three elements on its “radar screen” and be asking appropriate questions relevant to the integration of all three components;

- A proactive approach to analyzing the breadth and depth of its constituency and partners, and engagement of new constituents as appropriate to the context;
- Demonstrable success in terms of on-the-ground conservation work, and positioned to leverage this success for even greater impact, either by increasing effectiveness and/or expanding activities;
- A system to promote accountability, for both finances and programs, to constituents and partners;
- Willingness to identify indicators and methods for measuring progress toward program outcomes for the organization and the surrounding community, economy and ecosystem (see Reporting Requirements for more information);
- A commitment to strengthening the organization’s partnership with the U.S. Forest Service and support from the local Forest Supervisor; and
- A well-developed plan to strengthen organizational capacity as an investment into long-term sustainability.

Priority will be given to underserved and culturally diverse communities that have had limited access to financial and organizational resources.

Proposals will be reviewed by a committee comprised of members of the NFF Board and Staff, Forest Service representatives, and selected advisors from relevant fields.

### ***Private Matching Funds Requirements and Funding Disbursements***

Grants are for \$35,000 per year (\$70,000 total over two years if support is renewed) and require an annual match of \$10,000 per year (\$20,000 total for two years if support is renewed). For the first year, up to \$5,000 of the match may come from federal or in-kind sources. The remaining funds (at least \$5,000) must consist of cash contributions from non-federal sources.

For the second year of the program, all \$10,000 of the match must consist of cash contributions from non-federal sources. All non-federal matching funds and documentation of contributed goods and services to the project must be sent directly to the NFF. Once the non-federal funds, supporting documentation and a cash request form have been received by the NFF, Mid-Capacity funds will be released for receipt within approximately two weeks of the invoicing date.

Year one Mid-Capacity Assistance Program funds will be available at the start of the award period, subject to matching requirements. Year two funds will be distributed based on the progress of implementation and expenditures shown in the first year’s report, again, subject to

matching requirements. No extensions are possible under the Mid-Capacity Assistance Program award.

### ***Reporting Requirements***

Mid-Capacity Assistance Program award recipients will be required to provide an annual summary of all activities and expenditures for the duration of the two-year award period. In addition, the NFF and the grantee will jointly agree on a reasonable set of outcome-based indicators and means of measurement at the beginning of each year for each of the following categories: ecological, social, economic and capacity-building. The grantee will be expected to report on progress towards the agreed upon outcomes in the 12-month and final reports (for an example, see the NFF's tool on "Developing an Outcome-based Monitoring Plan" at [www.nationalforests.org](http://www.nationalforests.org)).

### ***Program Resources***

The NFF has developed Conservation Connect: A Collaboration Learning Network (formerly the Western Collaborative Assistance Network, or WestCAN) to provide the tools needed for engaging in collaborative, community-based stewardship on our National Forests and Grasslands. Conservation Connect is designed according to the NFF's peer learning philosophy of creating opportunities for practitioners on the ground to share their successes and challenges and to learn from the experiences of others. Conservation Connect hosts peer learning teleconferences ([www.nationalforests.org/consERVE/peer](http://www.nationalforests.org/consERVE/peer)) and offers mentoring, access to coaches, a resource library ([www.nationalforests.org/consERVE/resource](http://www.nationalforests.org/consERVE/resource)) with best practices and tools, and a variety of information on emerging topics of interest ([www.nationalforests.org/consERVE/learning](http://www.nationalforests.org/consERVE/learning)).

The Forest Service and the NFF have also jointly developed the online Partnership Resource Center ([www.partnershipresourcecenter.org](http://www.partnershipresourcecenter.org)), an excellent resource for community groups that focus on natural resource management issues.

### ***Proposal Components***

Proposals should contain the following components:

1. **Mid-Capacity Assistance Program Coversheet.** Using the "Five Life Stages of Nonprofit Organizations" tool, and engaging Board members, the Executive Director, and staff, assess what stage(s) your organization is in. You may find that the organization is in several different stages simultaneously, depending on the attribute of organizational development being discussed. Explain why you have chosen each particular stage in the text boxes provided.
2. Completed answers to the **Proposal Questions** (Appendix A);
3. A **two-year timeline** for proposed activities, showing how on-the-ground conservation and organizational change will occur. Include the staff resources and partners that will be involved in implementation;

4. A **list of participants** and the interests they represent, in order to demonstrate an inclusive and broad base of interest and support; and
5. A **two-year budget**, by year, showing NFF, private matching, in-kind and other federal funds anticipated or committed to your organization. This document can be found at [www.nationalforests.org](http://www.nationalforests.org). Definitions of funding sources and expense categories are provided in Appendix B.
6. A **budget narrative** briefly summarizing your financial plan in bulleted narrative form. For each expense category, specifically describe how NFF funds would be spent if the project is funded. Generally, two or three sentences for each category should be sufficient.
7. A **letter from the IRS** demonstrating nonprofit, tax-exempt status;
8. **Most recent audited financial statement**. If you do not have an audited financial statement, please send an unaudited accounting of finances; and
9. A **signed letter of support from the relevant U.S. Forest Service Forest Supervisor(s) stating approval and support of project** (see text box below for further detail on submitting your letter of support). Please do not send additional letters of support.

The NFF Cover Sheet, Budget Form, “Five Life Stages of Nonprofit Organizations” and “Developing an Outcome-Based Monitoring Plan” tools can be found on our Web site at: [www.nationalforests.org](http://www.nationalforests.org).

#### ***A Note on Letters of Support***

To be considered official, a letter of support must be either:

- Hand signed by the Forest Supervisor (or their delegate) and sent hard-copy either with the proposal, or mailed or faxed directly to the NFF; or
- Electronically signed, and sent directly to [aliljeblad@nationalforests.org](mailto:aliljeblad@nationalforests.org) from the Forest’s Electronic Records Database (usually operated by the Forest’s mailroom).

An electronically-signed letter of support may be submitted with your proposal, though it will not be considered official. A delayed USFS letter of support will not disqualify your proposal from review, though one should follow in no more than a few days after the proposal due date. If you expect the letter of support to be delayed, please paperclip a short note to the Coversheet stating when you expect the letter to be sent. Please do not send additional letters of support.

### ***Application Deadline***

Applications must be *received in our office* by the following deadline:

**June 14, 2011**

### ***To Apply***

Please submit one single-sided copy of your completed proposal, held together with a paperclip or binder clip to the address below. All proposals must be received in our office on or before

the deadline. You will receive confirmation of receipt of your proposal via email. Late proposals will not be accepted.

**National Forest Foundation  
Mid-Capacity Assistance Program  
Building 27, Suite 3, Fort Missoula Rd.  
Missoula, MT 59804**

***Questions?***

Contact Adam Liljeblad  
Director of Conservation Awards  
Phone: (406) 830-3357  
Fax: (406) 830-3382  
[aliljeblad@nationalforests.org](mailto:aliljeblad@nationalforests.org)

## APPENDIX A

# 2010 Mid-Capacity Assistance Program Proposal Questions

**The questions below are designed as an opportunity for you to demonstrate how you meet the selection criteria. Please answer every question. (No more than 8 pages.)**

### **A. Organizational Background**

1. Describe the social context in which you work. What are the opportunities and challenges?
2. Describe the collaborative nature of your organization. What steps do you plan to take to ensure diverse interests are engaged and benefiting from your work? How have you reached out to minority or underserved communities? How do you plan to reach out to them in the future?
3. What is your vision and mission? What strategies are you using to work toward your mission? What impacts do you hope to have? How are you thinking about the integration of ecology, community and economy?
4. When the organization was founded, who was initially engaged? Who benefited? Has this changed over time, and if so, how? What steps has the organization taken to promote this evolution?
5. Describe the staffing of the organization. How does each individual contribute to the goals of the organization?
6. Briefly describe your capacity to raise funds from more than one source.
7. How has the Board of Directors changed – increased its effectiveness and perhaps expanded – since the organization was founded? Please describe the Board at the time of incorporation (including skills in governance and accountability) and its present condition. What steps did the organization take to promote this evolution?

## B. Capacity-Building Goals

8. What are the desired changes in the organization that these funds will address? Describe how the funds will be used and the expected outcomes at the end of year two in terms of “back office, mission and context”. Suggest possible indicators for measuring progress toward these outcomes (please see “Developing an Outcome-Based Monitoring Plan” on the NFF website). In some cases, you may not make progress on every front. In other cases, you may just be starting one of the components<sup>1</sup>.
9. Describe the systems your organization has in place to promote accountability to constituents and partners. How has it identified the community’s vision and priorities? How does the organization keep the community informed of its work and progress toward their priorities? How does the organization keep its partners informed of its efforts?
10. How is your organization working to strengthen its relationship with the local Forest Service?

## C. On-the-Ground Conservation Project

11. Briefly describe your recent success(es) in terms of on-the-ground conservation. If successful, how will these funds help move your organization to the next level of impact in terms of community, natural resources and/or economy, whether by increasing your effectiveness and/or expanding your work? Include potential indicators for measuring progress toward these outcomes.
12. Describe the on-the-ground project you will implement during the award period. What are you proposing to do? How you will involve the community in the design and/or implementation of your project? Please provide your project description, clearly laying out specific, **on-the-ground** goals and objectives.
13. Please address whether the proposed project will require any type of environmental permitting, including National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) compliance. If so, has all required compliance been achieved?

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<sup>1</sup> Organizational development is often assessed in terms of three distinct elements: back office, mission and context. “Back office” refers to the details of governing and managing the organization, including board development, executive leadership, staffing, resource development, policies, financial management, etc. “Mission” refers to the conceptualization, planning, experience, technical knowledge, skills etc. needed to undertake the mission. “Context” refers to understanding the history, culture, race, class, and economic dynamics within which the organization acts. An organization, with sensitivity to context, designs and implements its work strategically to be most effective within the broader social and economic environment.

## APPENDIX B

### DEFINITIONS OF EXPENSE CATEGORIES

#### **Expense Categories:**

*Please use the provided expense categories for classifying expenditures, wherever possible.*

**Salaries & Benefits:** Wages and benefits for direct project work by employees of your organization. These can include project administration, project implementation, or similar expenses.

**Consultants/Contractors:** Any specialist(s) hired to do specific project-directed work that are neither employees of your organization or the federal government and are not volunteers.

**Stipends:** Generally, compensation for volunteers, conservation corps members or similar that are rated on daily or monthly basis, rather than hourly. In most cases, youth corps crew payments should be classified here.

**Office Expenses:** Postage, printing, communications or similar expenses directly related to project administration and implementation.

**Publications/Outreach Materials:** Expenses related to the recruitment of project participants or promotion of project results.

**Supplies:** Materials used or consumed in direct project implementation such as gloves, fencing, shovels, lumber, straw bales, or other similar materials. This includes tools with a per unit value of less than \$100.00.

**Equipment/Rental:** Expenditures related to the purchase or rental of tools or other durable goods used in direct project implementation. This includes tools with a per-unit value of \$100.00 or more. There may be certain restrictions on the use of NFF funds for the purchase of equipment valued at more than \$5,000.00. Please contact the NFF for more information if you believe this to be an issue.

**Travel:** Expenses related to official project travel. Current federal standard mileage rates can be found at <http://www.irs.gov>.

**Other:** Any project-directed expense not included in any of the above categories. Please only create additional categories after carefully reviewing the above definitions.