

Innovative Finance for National Forests
2024 Proposal Application
Deadline: Monday April 22, 2024, 8:00 p.m. EST.

Guidelines:

- Read the entire form before crafting your responses.
- Stay within the character limits, which include spaces.
- Reference the IFNF Request for Proposals for information on the program objectives, Focus Areas, Project Types, and criteria for awards here: <https://www.usendowment.org/ifnf/>.
- Please note, your project may fall into more than one Focus Area.

Program Contacts:

We encourage you to reach out to the following U.S. Forest Service (USFS) National Partnership Office contact with application questions or to discuss your ideas further. They can also help to connect applicants with Forest Service staff who are well positioned to help advance your project.

- Sophie Beavin, Conservation Finance Partnership Coordinator (sophie.beavin@usda.gov)

Submission: Please upload your completed proposal materials to the U.S. Endowment’s grantee portal: <https://usendowment.my.site.com/grantee/>. The application questions below should be answered in the portal but are listed below for your convenience in preparing your application.

Note: If you already have an account on the portal from a previous Endowment project, please use those login credentials. If you are a new user, please click on “New User” and follow the instructions to create an account. Once created, click on the “View Current RFPs” tab. For portal assistance, please contact subawards@usendowment.org.

PROPOSAL APPLICATION

Applicant

Lead Applicant (organization name):

Organization Type

- State/Municipality
- Tribal Nation
- Non-profit organization
- For-profit company
- College or University
- Other (leave space to write in – 100 characters)

Lead Project Manager:

Email:

Phone Number:

Address:

Website:

EIN:

Unique Entity Identifier: Must register on sam.gov to obtain and UEI number.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Project Information

Project Name (concise and specific to your project):

Proposed Project Start Date:

Proposed Project End Date:

Project Summary:

Concisely present your project idea. This should be a stand-alone “elevator pitch” that presents a compelling vision of your proposed innovative finance work, including the challenge addressed and how you propose to address it. (500 characters)

Summary of Financial Innovation:

Feasibility Projects: describe the research question or need central to your proposal, why it is needed, and the proposed methods by which you will address it. (1500 characters)

Pilot and Scaling Projects: describe the financial model or financial instrument central to your proposal, and how it will work. (1500 characters)

Project Characterization

Focus Area (Check at least one)

- Wildfire Resilience and Recovery
- Watershed Health
- Sustainable Recreation Infrastructure and Access

Jurisdiction and Ownership (Check one)

- National Forest System land only
- Adjacent lands only
- Cross-boundary combination of NFS and adjacent lands

Project Type (Check one, reference the RFP section **Project Types** for criteria)

- Feasibility
- Pilot
- Scaling

US Forest Service Contact (required for Pilot and Scaling projects, strongly encouraged for Feasibility projects)

USFS Point of Contact: Name and Title

USFS Point of Contact email and phone

USFS Unit and/or Program (*include multiple lines for multi-forest projects*)

USFS Region (check at least one)

- Region 1
- Region 2
- Region 3
- Region 4
- Region 5
- Region 6
- Region 8
- Region 9
- Region 10
- National

PROJECT NARRATIVE

1. Prior IFNF Grantees (5 points)

Prior grantees may apply for funding for a *new* project proposal; if that is your intent, please disregard this question. If you wish to apply for additional funding for an *ongoing* project, please discuss your approach with the IFNF program contact listed on page 8 of the RFP before applying. In general, requests for additional funding for an ongoing project should advance your work to a new Project Type phase (e.g., if you have a Feasibility grant, you could apply for a Pilot grant this round). Please explain why your project is ready to move to the next IFNF Project Type phase and why you require funding to do so, offering supporting and defensible rationale. (1000 characters)

2. Problem Statements (15 points)

- a) Environmental Problem: Please describe the specific environmental problem the proposed project attempts to solve for and how it affects key stakeholders. To reflect broader recognition of the scale of the problem you are addressing, please cite supporting literature. Be sure to explain why this problem the project solves fits into the Focus Area(s) and Project Type that you chose. (1000 characters)
- b) Finance Problem: Please describe the specific financial problem you are attempting to solve and how it affects key stakeholders. To reflect broader recognition of the scale of the problem you are addressing, please cite supporting literature. Be sure to explain why this finance barrier fits into the Focus Area(s) and Project Type that you chose. (1000 characters)

3. National Forest System Nexus (10 points)

Describe the relevance of the challenge addressed and proposed solution to the National Forest System, using the RFP (pg. 4 "Focus Areas") for guidance on USFS challenges and priorities. In addition, please describe the role of USFS units or programs in the project. It is advised to work with your USFS contact to craft this answer. (1000 characters)

Note: For Pilot and Scaling Projects IFNF requires a USFS letter of support with your application package (optional for Feasibility Projects).

4. Team and Partners (10 points)

Why are you the right team for the job? Identify key team members and partners and clearly describe their roles in the proposed project. Describe the fit, commitment, and experience of your project team and partners with specific attention to ensuring that team skills match well with the core competencies called for in the proposed solution. Note any prior experience working with the USFS as well as prior experience developing innovative finance projects. If partnerships are not yet established, describe how you plan to initiate collaboration. (2000 characters)

5. Policy (5 points)

Identify any legal and/or policy hurdles (anticipated or current) that need to be overcome to ensure project success (e.g., barriers or lack of clarity around laws or regulations at the federal, state, or local level, etc.). How do you plan to mitigate the impacts of those hurdles? For pilot and scaling projects, confirm that the USFS instruments needed to enable implementation of on-the-ground work are in place or are being addressed (e.g., cooperative agreements, stewardship contracts, special use permits). (1000 characters)

6. Practices and Methods (5 points)

Feasibility Projects: Please describe the research methods (e.g., survey, focus groups, data analysis) that will be employed for your project and why they have been chosen, describing their effectiveness, practicality, affordability, and applicability. (3,000 characters)

Pilot and Scaling Projects:

- a) Land Management: Please describe the proposed land management practices related to the project (e.g., thinning, waste-to-energy conversion, reforestation, fire management, etc.) underlying your proposal. Touch on why these practices have been chosen, highlighting their readiness, demonstrated effectiveness, practicality, affordability, and applicability. (1500 characters)
- b) Finance: Please describe the proposed financial innovation methods (e.g., financial modeling, quantification of ecosystem services, investor pitch guidance or education, etc.) underlying your proposal. Touch on why these approaches have been chosen, highlighting their readiness, effectiveness, practicality, affordability, and applicability. (1500 characters)

7. Payors (i.e., direct payment or repayment) (15 points)

Feasibility Projects: Please identify the Payors (defined below) that your project is targeting and articulate how your project will help unlock those Payors for future projects. What steps have you taken, or do you plan to take, to confirm the appeal of your project to those Payors? (1000 characters)

Pilot and Scaling Projects: Please identify the specific entity (e.g., utility, local government, corporation, agency, etc.) that will ultimately pay for the outcomes proposed by this project, providing evidence as to their willingness and ability to pay. (1000 characters)

Definition of Payors: Payors are the entities or individuals that ultimately pay for the outcomes of a project, either by repaying financing or directly supporting a project by paying for outcomes. The targeted Payors could be a specific off-taker, customer group/type, or beneficiary (such as utilities, farmers, or municipality). For projects that leverage public or private financing, note that payors are not the entities that provide upfront financing.

Note: For Pilot and Scaling Projects, IFNF requires a Payor letter of support with your application using the [template](#) provided (required for Pilot and Scale Projects; optional for Feasibility Projects).

8. Financing Sources (i.e., upfront capital) (10 points, only scored if financing is applicable to project)

Feasibility Projects: If financing is required, please identify potential sources of financing, and articulate how your project will help unlock upfront capital to finance future projects. What steps have you taken, or do you plan to take, to confirm the relevance of your project to these financing sources? (1000 characters)

Pilot and Scaling Projects: If financing is required, what upfront capital will you leverage from public or private entities to finance this project. How do you plan to mobilize that capital and what is your level of confidence in doing so? (1000 characters)

9. Project Sites/Project Readiness (5 points)

Pilot and Scaling Projects (optional for Feasibility projects): Please identify and describe your project site(s), including the anticipated land management activities (e.g., mechanical thinning, culvert removal, trail construction). What is the readiness of your project site(s) for implementation of land management activities, including: planning and permitting (NEPA); design, surveys, and site prep; and prioritization by USFS unit or other land manager. What local capacity (USFS or other) exists to implement land management activities at the pace and scale your project seeks to achieve? If barriers exist to implementation readiness, how do you plan to address those barriers? (1500 characters)

10. Impact and Scaling Potential (or Path to Scale) (10 points)

Feasibility Projects: What potential does your project have to unlock a scalable solution to the National Forest System challenge described in Question 3? Please make clear the ways in which your project could lead to impact at scale, and the steps that will be required to achieve that. (1000 characters)

Pilot and Scaling Projects: How will this project, once implemented, provide a long-term solution to the National Forest System challenge described in Question 3? Identify the market scale your solution is addressing and the potential for your solution to scale and achieve a significant share of the market (see guidance below). What steps will be required to achieve landscape-scale impacts or replication in many locations? (1000 characters)

The following framing provides an example of how to discuss market scale in three steps:

- 1) The total market for wildfire prevention, which is likely to represent \$XB in spending by governments, insurers, homeowners, and other actors by 2030, based on the following rationale.*
- 2) The segment of the market our solution is relevant for is wildfire prevention on NFS lands, which is likely to represent \$XB by 2030, based on the following rationale.*
- 3) Our solution's share of that relevant market is likely to represent X% of the market for wildfire prevention on NFS lands, which is likely to represent \$XB in spending by 2030.*

11. Measurable Outcomes (5 points)

Feasibility Projects: Describe, in detail, the metrics, tools, and processes you will use to measure and report on the economic, environmental, and/or social outcomes from this project, including the reporting format and the entity responsible for measurement. What outputs (e.g., report, business plan, feasibility study, etc.) will be generated through this grant? (1000 characters)

Pilot and Scaling Projects: Describe, in detail, the metrics, tools, and processes you will use to measure and report on the economic, environmental, and/or social outcomes from this project, including the reporting format and the entity responsible for measurement. What land management outcomes (e.g., acres treated, carbon sequestered) will be enabled by the innovative finance approach? (1000 characters)

12. Co-creation (5 points)

Please describe the level of effort taken to develop a proposed project solution that appropriately engages the targeted constituents to ensure sufficient uptake of the practices and interventions where these constituents are *essential* to project. These constituents could include groups such as landowners, farmers, ranchers, land trusts, community groups, government agencies, nonprofits, municipalities, or technical assistance providers. (Note we are not asking about investors or Payors in this question). (1000 characters)

13. Barriers to Success (5 points)

What are the two to three biggest challenges you anticipate to successful completion of this project, and what are your plans to address these challenges? (1000 characters)

14. Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) (5 points)

Does the project footprint overlap with an underserved community based on the [EPA's Environmental Justice Screening Tool](#)? If not, how have project efforts to date engaged the local community where work will be occurring and how will they be engaged in the future? (1000 characters)

Note: Definitions that the FS uses for equity and underserved communities are outlined in the [Executive Order 13985, Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities through the Federal Government](#).

15. Anything Else We Should Know? (1000 characters)

FINANCIAL INFORMATION:

- Amount Requested (nearest \$1,000)
- Total Project Budget (Includes requested amount plus any matching funds or funds from outside sources)
- Project Budget and Narrative: Please use the Endowment’s [Budget Template](#) to create your budget. If providing match, be sure to fill out the Match Budget Tab. Indirect Cost Rate if utilizing (upload Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement if applicable), Endowment’s Indirect Cost Rate Policy is [here](#)
- Cost Share Amount, Type, and Description (if providing cost share)

ATTACHMENTS

- Required:
 - [Risk Assessment Form](#)
 - Single Audit Report *(if required to comply)*
 - USFS letter of support *(optional for Feasibility Projects)*
 - Payor letter of support *([use template](#); required for Pilot and Scaling Projects, and optional for Feasibility Projects)*
 - Organizational Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) statement
- Optional:
 - Project map
 - Additional letters of support *(no more than two; only from critical project partners/stakeholders)*
 - Relevant publications, reports, or supporting documents *(no more than two; indicate specific numbered sections/headings in the attachment pertinent to the proposal; explain in the attachment how it is directly relevant to the specific project)*

WORKPLAN (10 points)

Provide a workplan that lists 5-10 activities you will undertake to achieve your project’s goals within the timeline of an IFNF grant. The workplan should call out notable milestones and/or deliverables for your project and the strategies you intend to use to accomplish them. *(Note that IFNF contracts are a maximum of 3 years (2024 – 2027). You will build the workplan in the Endowment’s portal).*

Workplan Activity	Detailed Description	Start and End Date	Strategies
<i>Enter a name or brief description of the workplan activity (225 characters)</i>	<i>Enter a more detailed description of the activity (13,000)</i>	<i>Enter the start and end date for the activity.</i>	<i>Enter the strategies to be used to accomplish the workplan activity (1500 characters).</i>

PROJECT CONTACTS

1. Technical/Team Lead Contact: Responsible for implementing the Workplan
2. Report Contact: Responsible for Interim & Final Reports
3. Finance Contact: Responsible for submitting Invoices
4. Contract Signatory: Responsible for signing Contract