

State of Montana  
Department of Natural Resources and  
Conservation  
Fire Protection Bureau



Bipartisan Infrastructure Law  
Volunteer Fire Assistance Grant  
Guide

Grant Year 2026

Federal Grant Dollars from the USDA Forest Service Available  
to Improve Fire Protection Capabilities in Unprotected or  
Inadequately Protected Areas.

## **VFA GRANT PROGRAM**

Volunteer Fire Assistance (VFA) funding supported by the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), also known as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL), will provide financial, technical, and related assistance to rural volunteer fire departments to conduct preparedness and mobilization activities, including training, equipping, and otherwise enabling response to requests for the prevention, control and suppression of fires occurring on rural lands and threatening rural communities.

## **MATCHING REQUIREMENTS**

- Match for Bipartisan Infrastructure Law-Volunteer Fire Assistance Grant **requires a 50/50 cost share match.**

## **ELIGIBLE APPLICANTS**

A rural fire department which is defined as "an organized, not for profit, fire protection organization that provides service primarily to a community or city with a population of 10,000 or less to a rural area, as defined by the Secretary of Agriculture, whose firefighting personnel is 80 percent or more volunteer, and that is recognized as a fire department by the laws of the State. 16 U.S.C. 2106.

Sponsored by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service which makes funding available to rural fire departments. This federal funding is passed through and administered by the Montana Department of Natural Resources (DNRC).

When DNRC receives a grant award of funds directly from a federal agency, DNRC is considered the primary recipient. When DNRC subawards (or subgrants) the funds to another entity, that entity is considered a subrecipient (or subgrantee), and DNRC is deemed a pass-through entity. At all three stages—from initial federal allocation, to grant, to subaward—funds are considered federal, and specific laws and rules apply.

## **COMPLIANCE WITH LAWS AND REGULATIONS**

### **Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Guidance**

- Subrecipients of federal grant funds must comply with the Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards (Uniform Guidance) published by the federal Office of Management and Budget (OMB).
- The Uniform Guidance is consolidated in the [Code of Federal Regulations](#) (CFR), Title 2, Part 200, Subparts A through F and appendices. These regulations, referred to collectively as “2 CFR 200,” are regularly referenced in this document. They can be viewed at [www.ecfr.gov](http://www.ecfr.gov) by selecting “Title 2 – Grants and Agreements”.

### **Additional Regulations Governing DNRC Subawards Include, But Are Not Limited To:**

- Federal, state, and local laws, statutes, rules, and ordinances, as applicable.
- The federal award—the signed agreement between DNRC and the federal agency providing funds. Terms and conditions of the federal award that are applicable to subrecipients are incorporated into the Subaward Agreement.
- The Subaward Agreement—a signed agreement that documents the legal relationship between DNRC and the subrecipient and describes each party’s roles and responsibilities; and
- Other federal, or state program requirements. These are communicated to the subrecipient through subaward-related materials such as the request for proposal, application, and Subaward Agreement, or via relevant agency websites and publications.

## REQUIREMENT TO RECEIVE SUBAWARD FUNDS

The following requirements must be met for an entity to receive subaward funds from DNRC:

- National Fire Incident Reporting (NFIRS) compliant by reporting ALL fire occurrences to NFIRS as required by Montana Law (ARM 23.12.402).
- National Incident Management System (NIMS) compliant.
- Financial assistance on any project requires a **non-federal** match for project expenditures. The funding must be matched on a 50 percent basis (50% VFA-50% match).
- Purchase(s) must be made following receipt of the Subaward Agreement. No purchase(s) may be made prior to the date listed on the VFA Subaward Agreement which will be eligible for cost-share assistance.

### Sam Registration

- Recipients are required to register with the federal government System for Award Management (SAM) at <https://sam.gov/content/home> prior to receiving an award. You will need a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI), Taxpayer ID Number (TIN), and financial information to set up Electronic Funds Transfer.

### EIN

- A subrecipient must have an Employer Identification Number (EIN), obtained from the IRS at <http://www.irs.gov>

### Debarment and Suspension

- Subrecipients of federal funds are required to sign Form AD-1048, "Certification Regarding Debarment, Suspension, Ineligibility and Voluntary Exclusion—Lower Tier Covered Transactions," certifying that neither their entity nor their principals have been debarred or suspended or are otherwise ineligible to receive federal funds. Federal debarment and suspended party searches can be conducted at the System for Award Management website: [www.sam.gov](http://www.sam.gov).

### Insurance Requirements

- Subrecipients must purchase and maintain liability insurance coverage equal to or exceeding the limits required in the Subaward Agreement. Prior to applying for subaward funds, applicants can contact the designated DNRC Program Representative for information about insurance requirements. Documentation required by DNRC to verify insurance depends on the type of entity:
  - Cities, towns, counties or organizations covered under either the Montana Municipal Interlocal Authority (MMIA) or Montana Association of Counties (MACo) have coverage verified by DNRC.
  - (2) Entities covered under private insurance companies must submit the following documentation to DNRC before a Subaward Agreement can be executed:
- A current Certificate of Liability Insurance specific to the award that (a) includes the types and maximum coverage for the insurance, (b) names the State of Montana as an additional insured and as the certificate holder, and (c) lists the DNRC Subaward Agreement Number on the face of the certificate.
- Endorsement, as required, to document the naming of the State of Montana as an additional insured. The address to use on the endorsement is: State of Montana.  
ATTN: DNRC Forestry Division, 2705 Spurgin Road, Missoula, MT 59804; or documentation of policy provisions covering Blanket Additional Insureds.

## PERIOD OF PERFORMANCE

- The program's primary intent is to support activities in preparation for the upcoming wildland fire season. Proposed projects should be ready for implementation upon award and should be substantially achievable by summer of 2025. Grant funds are provided on a reimbursement basis

after expenses are incurred, paid, and documented by the applicant organization. The maximum award period will be from March 1, 2026 - December 31, 2026.

## SELECTION PROCESS

- Funds are awarded through a competitive application process. Grant applications are received, reviewed, scored, and ranked by DNRC representatives. Countywide applications will receive priority consideration, with the exception of departments in counties without a countywide organization. In the case of departments in counties without a county fire association or rural fire council, countywide fire department, etc., your applications may be submitted through your County Fire Warden. Applications meeting the following conditions will receive priority consideration:
  - Complete and accurate application submission
  - National Fire Incident Reporting System (NFIRS) complaint.
  - Accurate/timely wildland fire occurrence reporting to the local DNRC office during the previous calendar year. (All reporting will be verified) Demonstrated need.
  - Community Wildland Fire Risk, based on the Montana Wildland Fire Risk Assessment
  - Number of Fire Department responses in 2025
  - Use(s) of funding
- Final recommendations and approval of awards will be made by the DNRC. Each applicant will be notified by mail or Email of the final status of their grant application. Additional information and instructions will be given to the selected applicants.

## AWARD NOTIFICATION

### Announcements are anticipated in February 2026.

- Applicants will be notified of funding recommendations after decisions are finalized. Upon grant award, formal agreements will be executed between the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) and each grantee organization.
- The Volunteer Fire Assistance Program Subaward Agreement, Agency name will match the name listed on your SAM.gov UEI# Entity Data Detailed Results.
- DNRC utilizes the DocuSign electronic signature service for agreement execution. The Authorized Representative will receive any agreement for signature at the email address provided.
- The Authorized Representative is the person who has legal authority to enter into an agreement with DNRC and will sign any agreement documents.

## REIMBURSEMENT INSTRUCTIONS

- **The VFA award is administered as a reimbursement award.** Once the project is completed, the award grantee must provide proper documentation to support a reimbursement request which includes copies of invoices, (pro forma invoices, quotes and/or statements are not acceptable) town warrants and/or copy of canceled checks front and back, copy of credit card/bank statement as evidence that approved items have been purchased and paid for. **Statements/Invoices from vendors stamped “paid” or “amount due \$0.00” are not acceptable as proof of payment.** Proper documentation to support in-kind match must include an individual’s name, dates, hours, and activity. This can include training/meeting rosters and maintenance logs. A Vendor Invoice must also be completed with information required for payment.

## **REIMBURSEMENT REQUESTS**

- No funds will be reimbursed for expenses incurred prior to execution of a formal written agreement between (DNRC) and the applicant organization.
- Purchases must match your application request (Appendix A), otherwise your department will not be reimbursed.

Requests for reimbursement must be received by December 31, 2026. Extensions will not be awarded, and award dollars cannot roll forward. Unspent dollars will be reallocated.

## **CAPITAL EQUIPMENT PURCHASES**

- Due to the USDA Forest Service purchase requirements and five-year monitoring process, equipment, or supply purchases with a unit value of \$5,000 or more **cannot** be funded, or partially funded, under this grant program.

## **MAINTENANCE REQUIREMENTS**

- VFA grant funds are intended to support ongoing fire department response capabilities across Montana - and the expectation is that items funded under this program will remain in use for their normal serviceable lifetime. Normal maintenance is the responsibility of the local fire department/district.

## **RADIO EQUIPMENT – P25 COMPLIANCE – USDA Forest Service VFA Grant Requirement**

- The primary purpose of radio funding is to assist departments with two-way radio communications which will meet the EIA/TIA 102A standards for interoperability for public safety agencies (APCO Project 25 Compliant) and specifically will be used to communicate with Montana DNRC State Forestry and other Federal, State and Local Firefighting agencies on wildland/urban interface fires.
- Two-way radio communication equipment purchased must meet or exceed the APCO Project 25 Standards (EIA/TIA102A). Radio equipment will need to operate in the VHF Spectrum of 136Mhz. to 174Mhz. and be fully P25 compliant. Local two-way radio communications dealers and distributors can assist with information about manufacturers that currently produce P25 compliant two-way radio equipment and or radio equipment that meets this requirement.

## **TRAVEL EXPENDITURES**

- Reimbursement of all travel expenditures for training or other purposes must be consistent with state written travel policies. <https://doa.mt.gov/employee-travel>

## **QUESTIONS:**

Questions about the application process or VFA program guide may be directed to:

Rhea Blankenship  
VFC/VFA Grant Program  
2705 Spurgin Road  
Missoula, MT 59804  
[rheablankenship@mt.gov](mailto:rheablankenship@mt.gov)  
406-542-4267

ALLOWABLE AND UNALLOWABLE COST		
COST ITEMS	YES	NO
Fire Department Organization and Planning. Formation of a <b>NEW</b> rural or volunteer fire district.	YES	
Wildland firefighting supplies such as basic tools, fireline hand tools, hose, adapters/reducers, fittings, valves, pumps, nozzles, fold-a-tanks, portable tanks, chainsaws, hydrant wrenches, kestrels, drip touches, flares (fuses), and weather kits.	YES	
Wildland <b>training</b> expenses, such as instructor fees, travel expenses, tuition costs, classroom materials for either basic or advanced courses.	YES	
Pumps or slip-on units for apparatus new, refurbished or repairs. Portable pumps and accessories, dip tanks. Chainsaws and basic accessories.	YES	
Wildland basic PPE, such as new generation fire shelters, fire resistant shirts and pants, coveralls, hard hats, eye protectors, gloves. Needs to be NFPA 1977 Compliant. Fireline pack/belt assembly.	YES	
Wildland communications equipment, such as narrow-band or narrow-band compatible handheld or vehicle units, pagers and accessories and Global Position Units (GPS). All communications equipment must be P25 compliant. Base radio stations, radio charging bases, extra batteries, radio vehicle installation hardware as needed.	YES	
Freight or shipping costs for allowable items	YES	
Fire Prevention materials.		NO
Acquisition of land.		NO
Construction or remodeling of buildings or any work on “real” property (such as wells). Rental/Lease of buildings/mobile office.		NO
Emergency <u>medical</u> equipment/supplies, rescue equipment or extraction equipment, tow ropes and first aid kits. VFA funds are for fire use only.		NO
Structural firefighting accessories or equipment. SCBA (self-contained breathing apparatus) systems.		NO
Boots, socks, thermal underwear, rain suits, rain jackets, and structural turnout gear. Custom-made packs, personal gear bags, sleeping bags.		NO
Generators, ATVs or UTV’s type utility vehicles, trailers, water rescue equipment, routine maintenance of fire equipment, such as tires, batteries, tune-ups.		NO
Personnel wages (as in employees on a payroll) will only be funded if they relate to “instructor fees” for training project activities. These award dollars are not intended to pay for wages, salaries, stipends, or other volunteer/employee payments unless it relates to being an instructor.		NO
“Walkie- talkies”, two-way radios and cell phones, Unmanned Aerial Systems		NO
Due to the USDA Forest Service purchase requirements and five-year monitoring process. Requests for single item of equipment with a value equal to or greater than \$4,999.		NO
Office equipment, mobile phones, drones, computers, software, smoke detectors, TVs, DVD players, cameras, VCRs, or projectors. GPS accessories (additional software, carrying cases, etc.).		NO
Logo wear and logo items (t-shirts, sweatshirts, jackets, pens, flashlights etc. printed with a fire department’s logo or name)		NO