

Wildland Fire Smoke Preparedness in Community Buildings Grant Program

Stakeholder Feedback Summary

<https://www.epa.gov/indoor-air-quality-iaq/wildfire-smoke-preparedness-community-buildings-grant-program>

Overview of Engagements and Respondent Characteristics

Feedback Mailbox Open: October 4 – November 14, 2022

Events held:

- October 13: Listening Session (open to the public)
- October 18: National Environmental Justice Community Engagement Call agenda item (open to the public)
- October 27: National Tribal Air Association/EPA Air Policy Call (invitation only)

EPA sought input on the design of the program to inform the types of projects and grant recipients that may be eligible for the program. In particular, EPA requested feedback on the following:

- What types of buildings are most in need of assistance? Who do they serve? How would you identify them?
- What is needed to better prepare buildings for wildfire smoke events?
- What are the largest costs associated with preparing buildings for wildfire smoke events?
- How could measures to prepare buildings for smoke through these grants be sustained in the long term?
- How could lessons learned from these projects better inform future projects with similar goals?
- What barriers might your organization face in applying for these grants? What kind of support would you need to apply?
- How can EPA best reach economically distressed communities through this grant program?

EPA received over 200 comments from more than 90 commentors that were responsive to the request for public input.

Commentors and participants in the stakeholder engagements originated from 25 states and 1 territory.

Several types of organizations provided comments:

- Federal, state, local and tribal governments
- Academic/research organizations
- Childcare/education organizations
- Private industry
- Non-profit organizations
- International entities

Summary of Feedback Received

EPA reviewed and organized the comments based on themes. Recommendations from all stakeholder engagements are summarized below.

Buildings and Communities

Communities

- Consider a mix of urban and rural communities
- Consider prescribed fire communities
- Prioritize low-income and disadvantaged communities
- Prioritize vulnerable populations

Building Types

- Eligible buildings should include:
 - homes, including farmworker housing;
 - schools, child care centers, preschools, and other buildings that serve children and youth;
 - Long-term care facilities, health clinics, and hospitals;
 - Community centers, libraries, senior centers, emergency buildings (e.g. cleaner air shelters, cooling centers); and
 - Churches, hotels, dorms, and government buildings.
- Prioritize older buildings

Gaps and Challenges

Filtration and HVAC Interventions

- Portable air cleaners, including DIY air cleaners, are needed for home and buildings without central air filtration.
- Buildings need HVAC systems that can provide high-efficiency filtration and qualified staff to evaluate and maintain systems.
- Consider gas filtration and odor control solutions.
- Consider emerging technologies such as bipolar ionization and hydroxyl radical generators.

Weatherization

- Consider weatherization activities to ensure that buildings are well-sealed.

Indoor and Outdoor Air Quality Monitoring

- Consider indoor and outdoor air quality monitoring to support planning and evaluating activities to reduce smoke concentrations indoors.

Smoke Readiness Planning

- Encourage the development of Smoke Readiness Plans at the building and community levels.
- Building occupants should have access to N95 respirators.

Cleaner Air Shelters

- Buildings designated as cleaner air shelters/spaces need to have specific characteristics, such as providing access to food, water, restrooms, and privacy, in addition to the capacity to reduce smoke infiltration.

Communication and Outreach Needs

- Need translated and culturally appropriate materials to reach disadvantaged communities.
- Need more technical information about existing HVAC and filtration options for various audiences.
- Building owners and facility managers need a better understanding of how to operate and maintain ventilation and filtration systems.
- Decision making tools are needed for indoor air quality assessment and community needs assessments related to wildland fire smoke events.
- Consider targeted outreach to groups with a key role in implementing wildland fire smoke preparedness activities or protecting vulnerable groups, such as HVAC specialists, childcare providers, homeowner and neighborhood associations, physicians, teachers, and emergency services staff.

Building Codes and Standards

- Recommendations for building codes to address wildland fire smoke preparedness are needed.

Financial Resource Needs

Major Project Costs

- These major costs incurred in wildland fire smoke preparedness were identified:
 - HVAC improvements and operation and maintenance costs
 - Purchase of portable air cleaners
 - Weatherization
 - Smoke and ash cleanup
- Ongoing costs related to maintenance after the initial project can be challenging to cover, such as staffing for cleaner air spaces, filter replacements, and electricity costs.

Ideas for Maximizing the Impact of this Program with Limited Funding

- Consider how these grants can complement other funding vehicles such as small business grants, or grant programs through HUD and DOE.
- Consider limiting projects that propose costly building improvements that, while effective, serve a limited population.
- Consider ways to develop best practices or lessons learned from these projects that will benefit other communities in the future.

Sustained Improvements

Ideas to Encourage Sustainability of Projects Funded by this Program

- Consider resilience and sustainability for future events, including related events like dust storms, and other indoor air concerns.
- Encourage purchase of products with a long lifespan and lower operating costs.
- Promote community engagement to hear specific concerns.
- Encourage a multi-hazard approach that considers other natural and climate-related disasters that intersect with wildfires, such as power outages and extreme heat.

Ideas to Encourage the Sustainability of Future Projects

- Consider how data and experiences from these projects could support the development of model smoke preparedness plans, smoke management policies, and smoke preparedness toolkits.
- Generate data on the effectiveness of interventions through demonstration projects on weatherization, school indoor air quality and energy efficiency, homes with swamp coolers, and health impacts and air quality indicators.
- Host a forum where grantees can share insights from their projects at the end of the program.

Potential Applicants

Input on Eligible Recipients

- Encourage partnerships with representative community-based organizations (CBOs) to reach disadvantaged groups.
- Local agencies/CBOs will need technical assistance.
- Consider how subawards through States would be managed.
- Libraries and childcare licensing agencies are unique entities that should be encouraged to apply.
- Recipients should be able partner with for-profit companies with relevant technical expertise.

Input on Eligible Buildings and Communities

- Consider how to identify economically distressed communities, such as by focusing on low-income communities, considering income distribution among neighborhoods, and establishing a set-aside for projects serving low-income communities.
- Consider wildfire risk/impact as an eligibility criterion.

Input on the Application Process, Outreach, and Training

- Consider ways to simplify the application.
- Staff bandwidth is a barrier to apply for many organizations.
- Waive matching requirements as much as possible.
- Provide grant writing training and assistance.
- Consider how applicants within a state can coordinate proposals, considering that 25% of funding can be awarded to recipients in any one state.
- Indirect rate agreements would help reduce overhead.