



STATE OF MAINE
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, CONSERVATION & FORESTRY
MAINE FOREST SERVICE
22 STATE HOUSE STATION
AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333

JANET T. MILLS
GOVERNOR

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August 19, 2024

VOLUNTEER FIRE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (VFA)

Application deadline: November 15, 2024

The Forest Protection Division of the Maine Forest Service and the Forestry Committee of the Maine Fire Chief's Association is pleased to announce that applications for the USDA Forest Service VFA cost share grant program are currently being accepted for fiscal year 2025.

The purpose of the Volunteer Fire Assistance (VFA) program is to provide Federal financial, technical and other assistance to state foresters and other appropriate officials to organize, train, and equip fire departments in rural areas and rural communities to prevent and suppress fires. A rural community is defined as having 10,000 or less population based on the most current US census. This 10,000 population limit is meant to ensure that fire departments that need the most financial assistance receive available VFA funding.

Eligibility: Below are the eligibility criteria for application to the VFA program.

- A single fire department serving a rural area or a rural community with a population of 10,000 or less is eligible. This will be based on the 2020 census data.
- A single community with a population greater than 10,000 and having a single fire department with one or more fire stations may qualify. The fire department must have a service area that exclusively serves a rural area or community that does not exceed 10,000 population. The VFA funding must be used only for the benefit of that rural population. Similarly, a single community with a population greater than 10,000 which also provides fire protection to an adjoining rural community of 10,000 or less population by contract may also be eligible provided the VFA funding is used entirely to support the rural community.
- A single community fire department serving a population greater than 10,000 and not providing protection to a rural area or to a rural community is not eligible for VFA financial assistance.
- Fire Departments and municipalities must be NIMS compliant. NIMS status will be checked through annual FEMA NIMS surveys.
- Unorganized towns, Homeowner associations and Plantations without Fire Departments are not eligible unless they go through their contracted Fire Department.

The application deadline is November 15, 2024. Applicants are encouraged to use the online application: <https://arcg.is/lz1qyO1> (new for 2024), though written applications are acceptable. All applications must have been completed (online application) or postmarked by November 15, 2024. Late submissions will not be accepted. Written applications can be mailed to: Maine Forest Service, Attn: Kent Nelson, 22 State House Station, Augusta, ME 04333-0022.

Please ensure the appropriate amount of postage is on mailed applications, as many are arriving with postage due.

PATTY CORMIER, DIRECTOR
MAINE FOREST SERVICE
18 ELKINS LANE, HARLOW BUILDING



PHONE: (207) 287-2791

WWW.MAINEFORESTSERVICE.GOV

What types of wildland firefighting equipment can be reimbursed?

Priority will be given to wildland fire personal protective equipment, pumps, foam, wildland fire hose and hand tools.

The following items are eligible under the VFA grant, but other items may also qualify:

- wildland fire personal protective equipment
- pumps and associated equipment used in wildland fire suppression
- Class A Foam
- equipment for foam application
- hand or power tools used in wildland fire suppression
- portable radios and pagers
- dry hydrants and cisterns (Note: match from this grant is limited to less than \$2000 per hydrant for organized towns and less than \$3500 per hydrant for unorganized towns and plantations)
- fire hose used for wildland fire suppression
- forestry nozzles used for wildland fire suppression
- other equipment used for wildland fire suppression or pre-suppression.

No single piece of equipment shall exceed \$4,999.00 in cost. A slip-on tank includes tank, pump and hose reel. The combined cost must not exceed \$4999.00. This is a 50/50 matching grant. **The maximum amount of grant funds awarded per applicant is \$5,000.00.**

Requests for funding will NOT be considered for:

- Any single item costing more than \$4,999.00
- Repair or construction of buildings
- Land acquisition
- Water lines and hydrants (*except for dry hydrants* with the limitations listed above)
- The rehabilitation of existing dry hydrants
- Vehicles (including ATV's), parts or modifications to vehicles
- Hose over 2 ½" (*unless justified in the grant application narrative*)
- PTO pumps
- Generators
- Boots
- Any equipment not directly related to wildland fire suppression or pre-suppression (e.g., drones, rescue equipment, etc.)
- Routine operating supplies or expenses

Specific limits on communication equipment and power equipment (chainsaws, leaf blowers, etc.):

- Portable radios and pagers are acceptable only if they are narrowband compliant.
- No more than \$300 reimbursement will be given for each portable radio, or pager. Remote microphones and any other radio accessories must be listed separately on application.
- The maximum number of portable radios and /or pagers per applicant is a total of four each.
- Base station radios, repeaters, antennas, and mobile radios are not eligible.
- This grant cannot be used for cellular phones.
- No more than \$250 reimbursement for chainsaws and leaf blowers.

Program rules:

- The application must be signed by an authorized representative of the fire department/municipality.
- Printed quotes for requested equipment *must* be provided with written applications.
- Applications for more than \$5,000 in grant funds will not be considered. Grant funds must be matched with an equal amount of local funds (\$5,000 grant funds + \$5,000 matching funds = \$10,000 project).
- No single item may cost more than \$4,999.00.

- Final Selections will be made by December 20, 2024. **Projects must be completed by June 30, 2025.**
- Extensions may be granted by the Director of the Forest Protection Division for extenuating circumstances.
- **Projects and documentation not completed / provided by June 30, 2025, may be terminated.**
- **Items must be ordered by May 4, 2025, to meet the June 30, 2025 deadline.**
- Both the "*Assurances*" and "*Agreements*" forms with a federal System for Award Management (SAM) number must be signed and returned to the program coordinator by **March 21, 2025**. The federal government has stopped using the DUNS number and is now only using the SAM number. For more information, and to be sure your entity has a SAM number, visit: <https://sam.gov/content/home>. It may take up to one month to get a SAM number for your agency. The SAM number is good for all future federal grants you apply for.
- Funds will be reimbursed only when the project has been satisfactorily completed and final reports received and approved.
- **The VFA grant is administered as a reimbursement grant.** Proper documentation to support a reimbursement request includes copies of invoices (quotes and/or statements are not acceptable) **and** town warrants and/or canceled checks as evidence that approved items have been purchased and paid for. If personal credit cards are used, then a copy of the reimbursement check from the town or fire department must be provided. Statements from vendors stamped "paid" are not acceptable as proof of payment.
- Reimbursement money will NOT be provided for in-kind services. Any reimbursement for labor must have a detailed receipt.
- No more than 10% of the total grant funds available will be used for dry hydrants and cisterns.

Matching funds guidelines:

- Minimum match is 50% of the total project cost.
- Applicants must match grant funds with cash on an equal cost share basis.
- Reimbursement checks will only be written for items purchased *after* the award letters are issued in January 2024.

Selection Criteria:

Applications will be evaluated and selected by members of the Maine Forest Service, Forest Protection Division and the Maine Fire Chief's Association's Forestry Committee. All projects must demonstrate that equipment will be used in wildland fire suppression. Towns that respond to more wildland fires will take precedence for award amounts.

To request an application, or assistance with completing the application, visit <http://www.maineforestservice.gov/> or call Forest Ranger Specialist Kent Nelson at 207-287-4989.