



Email: info@mtnsfepscor.org

Website: <https://smartfires.mtnsfepscor.org>

2026–27 SMART FIRES Two- and Four-Year Montana Colleges Seed Award Request for Proposals

Deadline: October 9, 2026

Background

The Sensors, Machine Learning, and Artificial Intelligence in Real Time Fire Science (SMART FIRES) NSF EPSCoR RII Track-1 project develops and deploys new technologies to better understand prescribed fire behavior and its impacts on Montanans, particularly in rural and tribal communities. The statewide team spans Montana State University, University of Montana, Montana Technological University, Salish Kootenai College, Little Big Horn College, and Flathead Valley Community College, working across four thematic teams — Fire and Smoke Science (FSS), Smart Optical Sensors (SOS), Social Psychology, Economics, and Ethics (SPEE), and Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning (AIML) — plus programs in cyberinfrastructure, STEM education, workforce development, outreach, and broadening participation.

Objectives

SMART FIRES' Seed Award program for Montana's two- and four-year campuses funds new and expanded undergraduate education and workforce development in prescribed fire science and related STEM fields. Awards can support student education programs that respond to Montana's STEM workforce needs — particularly in prescribed fire — as well as faculty development in these areas. Examples include a new fire science course, independent student or faculty projects on the technical or social dimensions of fire science, faculty professional development, or other innovative ideas that build prescribed fire-related education capacity and workforce development at two- and four-year institutions. Faculty and instructors at these campuses are encouraged to apply. Priority goes to projects that clearly link to SMART FIRES project goals.

Award information

Maximum Funding Per Award: Up to \$10,000, which must include any allowable indirect costs (F&A). Funding for each seed project will be provided through new or updated subawards from MSU.

Estimated Number of Awards: We anticipate funding 2-3 projects, depending upon available funding and the number of proposal submissions.

Award Period: January 1, 2027 to August 31, 2027

Key dates

Application deadline	Friday, October 9, 2026
Award notification	Friday, October 23, 2026
Funds must be fully spent by	August 31, 2027

Eligibility

Any instructor or faculty member at a two- or four-year Montana University System campus, Montana Tribal College, or Montana private college may apply (MSU and UM are not eligible for this RFP). Prior EPSCoR funding is not required. Participants currently funded by SMART FIRES are not eligible to apply.



— MONTANA NSF EPSCoR —
SMART FIRES

Email: info@mtnsfepscor.org

Website: <https://smartfires.mtnsfepscor.org>

Partnering with an existing SMART FIRES research or education team is encouraged but not required. All supported investigators and students must be from Montana institutions.

Montana NSF EPSCoR also offers separate seed funding for Montana Tribal Colleges. Visit <https://smartfires.mtnsfepscor.org/funding-opportunities/> for more information.

How to apply

Email a proposal as a PDF to SMART FIRES Project Manager Ben Williamson (ben.williamson2@montana.edu) by Friday, October 9, 2026. Submit the budget separately as an Excel file using the budget template. Your proposal must include:

Cover Page (1 page)

- Proposal title
- Lead investigator, co-investigator(s), affiliation, and contact information
- Summary for a general audience (250 words max)

Project Description (3 pages max)

- Objectives and their connection to SMART FIRES priorities
- Research plan: framework, hypotheses, questions, methods
- Activities and timeline, including planned use of any equipment for research and education
- Anticipated outcomes: knowledge created, expected publications or proposals, and student research opportunities (number and type)

Additional Required Information

- **Budget and 1-page justification**, using the budget template. Eligible costs: salaries and wages, supplies, contracted services, travel, and tuition (fees not allowable). Include fringe benefits on all personnel salary and institutional F&A at your institution's approved rate — F&A cannot be waived.
- CV or resume of the project lead
- References cited (if applicable)

Reporting requirements

Grantees must provide project updates and supported-participant information to the Montana EPSCoR State Office when requested, and submit a final report (1–3 pages) within 2 months of the award end date. The report should cover activities, supplies purchased, publications, new courses developed, and any extramural grant applications or awards resulting from support — including names, degrees, and demographic information for supported students. All supported participants must also complete the About You section of the [NSF EDOCS reporting system](#).

Proposal review

Proposals are reviewed by the Montana NSF EPSCoR office and the SMART FIRES Leadership Team against NSF merit review criteria (intellectual merit and broader impacts), relevance to SMART FIRES goals, budget justification, institutional diversity, and potential to expand research access — especially for undergraduates, women, and underrepresented minority students.

Proposal submission

Submit the proposal as a PDF and the budget as an Excel file by email to ben.williamson2@montana.edu by **5:00 pm MDT, October 9, 2026**.