



Email: info@mtnsfepscor.org

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

2026–27 SMART FIRES UM Research Seed Award

Request for Proposals

Deadline: October 16, 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

The Research Seed Award program funds **transformative research and capacity building aligned with SMART FIRES goals**. Awards may cover equipment, personnel costs (faculty, postdocs, student researchers), field data collection and analysis, research travel, and collaboration costs; all supported participants must be from Montana institutions. The program aims to: (1) advance novel prescribed-fire research that increases productivity and attracts new external funding, and (2) expand research access for graduate and undergraduate students. UM faculty are encouraged to apply with novel research proposals within the SMART FIRES scope. Priority goes to projects likely to produce publications, follow-on grants, or strong education/workforce outcomes; proposals are also assessed for their impact on broadening participation.

Award information

Maximum Funding Per Award: Up to \$25,000. Budgets do not need to include F&A costs.

Estimated Number of Awards: At least one award, likely more; the number of awards will be based on evaluation of proposals and available funding.

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

Key dates

Application deadline	Friday, October 16, 2026
Award notification	Friday, October 30, 2026
Funds must be fully spent by	August 31, 2027

Eligibility

Any UM faculty member may apply; prior EPSCoR funding is not required. Participants currently funded by SMART FIRES are not eligible to apply, though partnering with an existing SMART FIRES research team is allowed. All supported investigators and students must be from Montana institutions.



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How to apply

Email a proposal as a PDF to SMART FIRES Project Administrator Erika Hildner (erika.hildner@mso.umt.edu) by Friday, October 16, 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 found here: [\[Seed Award Budget Template\]](#). Eligible costs include: equipment; postdoc, undergraduate, or graduate student salaries/RA support and tuition (fees are not allowable); supplies; travel; and up to one week of summer salary for one faculty member. Include fringe benefits on all personnel salary.
- CVs for all investigators
- Statement agreeing to submit a final report within 2 months of award completion and to respond promptly to information requests from the Montana EPSCoR Office
- References cited (if applicable)

Reporting requirements

Grantees must provide requested updates to the Montana EPSCoR State Office, including annual reporting and supported-participant information, and are expected to attend a SMART FIRES annual meeting or all-project meeting following the award period. A final report (1–3 pages) is due within 2 months of the award end date, covering activities, equipment purchased, publications, new courses, participant information, and any extramural grant applications or awards resulting from support. 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, and potential to expand research access.

Proposal submission

Submit the proposal as a PDF and the budget as an Excel file by email to erika.hildner@mso.umt.edu by **5:00 pm MDT, October 16, 2026**.