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Colorado State Forest Service Forest Restoration and Wildfire Risk Mitigation Capacity Grant Recommendations

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Cover. Longmont's Button Rock Preserve Fuels Reduction and Forest Health Project 2021 included treating 46 acres of forests to protect the watershed and reduce wildfire risk near Lyons. The FRWRM grant, administered by the Colorado State Forest Service, was funded in spring 2021. The grant was concluded in February 2024. **Photo: City of Longmont, for CSFS**

Executive summary

The Forest Restoration and Wildfire Risk Mitigation (FRWRM) grant program, established in 2017 through SB17-050, provides state-appropriated funding for forest management projects on private lands across Colorado. This yearly appropriation supports projects that reduce wildfire risk to wildland urban interface (WUI) communities and structures, promotes forest health and restoration, promotes the use of wood products and ensures alignment with county and state-level priorities in fuels and forest health priority treatment acreage. Up to 25% of this yearly funding may be spent on funding capacity projects that seek to increase local capacity to address broader fuels and forest health priorities.

The FRWRM Capacity Building funding track provides a flexible funding source that supports a wide range of activities, from equipment purchases to staffing, planning and community-based efforts. This flexibility is a key strength of the program, enabling grantees to address diverse local capacity needs across the state. At the same time, there is a need to strengthen the program’s ability to clearly articulate, assess and communicate the impact of its capacity investments. In this report, we provide recommendations for the Colorado State Forest Service (CSFS) to better track and monitor the contributions capacity funding makes to Colorado, drawing on 1) a preliminary assessment of the program that used document analysis of past grant applications to better understand what capacity funding has supported (e.g., equipment, personnel, contracting); 2) an examination of other capacity grants that are similar to FRWRM to better understand their reporting requirements (and conversations with those grant administrators); and 3) a detailed review of the FRWRM application, scoring and selection materials and processes.

FRWRM Capacity Grants are currently categorized by expenditure type (e.g., equipment, personnel), which provides limited insight into the functions those investments support or how they can contribute to program goals. Reporting requirements are similarly uneven and often emphasize outputs rather than outcomes, making it difficult to assess program effectiveness or impact.

In turn, we developed 10 recommendations for the CSFS to consider that could strengthen the program while maintaining its flexibility. Due to the exploratory nature of the preliminary analysis, Recommendation 1 is to strengthen analyses and reconsider capacity designations. Other key recommendations include:

- Clarifying how capacity investments are intended to contribute to FRWRM program goals through purpose statements and/or logic or conceptual models
- Organizing capacity investments around core organizational and collaborative functions to better link activities to outcomes
- Developing a tailored menu of metrics and reporting approaches that balance accountability with grantee capacity
- Aligning application materials, selection criteria and reporting requirements to create a consistent throughline for applicants and administrators
- Enhancing guidance, communication and long-term evaluation to improve program accessibility and demonstrate impact

Taken together, these recommendations present options that could improve the effectiveness and evaluability of the FRWRM Capacity Building funding track. We note that these are recommendations only, and that not all of these would be necessary to make improvement. CSFS capacity, both personnel and funding, will dictate the ability to implement recommendations.

Background

The [Forest Restoration and Wildfire Risk Mitigation](#) (FRWRM) program, established through [Senate Bill 17-050 \(SB17-050\)](#), has had seven rounds of funding from 2017 to 2024 and is administered by the Colorado State Forest Service (CSFS). Since 2021, the program receives an annual allocation of \$8 million to fund Fuels & Forest Health projects and capacity-building projects. Fuels & Forest Health projects include projects that reduce wildfire risk and improve forest health mainly on private and state lands. Starting in 2021, federal lands may be included in FRWRM treatments, as long as the federal lands exist in continuity with ongoing treatments and constitute no more than 50% of the total requested acreage. Capacity-building projects include projects that increase community capacity to plan and implement Fuels & Forest Health projects and are limited to 25% (up to \$2 million) of the total available FRWRM grant funds. These types of projects could include increasing staffing, purchasing equipment, specific project planning efforts and combinations of these. The main intent of the FRWRM grant program is to support community-level actions that do the following:

- 1. Strategically reduce wildfire risk to values/assets in the WUI
- 2. Promote forest health and/or forest restoration
- 3. Encourage the utilization of woody material generated
- 4. Align with county-level wildfire risk reduction planning and statewide wildfire risk and forest health goals

Prior to FRWRM, the state had the Colorado Wildfire Risk Reduction Grant Program (WRRG), administered by the Colorado Department of Natural Resources (DNR). WRRG had five rounds of funding from 2013 to 2016. This grant also provided funding for capacity building, although “capacity” was limited to funding equipment purchases only. Previous research on this program highlighted that most funding went to applicants from higher-resourced organizations, higher-population communities and more economically developed areas of Colorado due to these applicants submitting more competitive applications (Cheng & Dale, 2020). In contrast, applications from lower-income communities were often incomplete, failed to integrate supportive data and provided unrealistic timelines. Based on these findings, researchers recommended establishing and sustaining a capacity-building program to support lower-resourced organizations and communities (Cheng & Dale, 2020), which FRWRM now does.

To make FRWRM more accessible to lower-resourced organizations and communities, the Colorado Social Vulnerability Index (SVI) geospatial layer was added in 2020 to grant application resources. Communities with project or focus areas that intersect with socially vulnerable areas are now eligible for a reduced match requirement of 25% instead of 50%. Social vulnerability in this context is defined as at least 40% of total population are low income, at least 50% of households are housing cost burdened, at least 40% of the population are people of color or at least 20% of the households are linguistically isolated (including Tribal Nations) (Vomitadyo & Bayham, 2023).

SB17-050 directs the CSFS to monitor the grantees’ compliance and the program’s effectiveness for both Fuels & Forest Health Grants and Capacity Grants. Compliance is monitored through the reimbursement process, with all expenses from projects submitted and approved by the CSFS to ensure funds are being used for legitimate project purposes that fall within the scope of work submitted after grant funds are awarded. This grant program is therefore a reimbursement program, wherein grantees pay for work to be conducted and are subsequently reimbursed through the grant funds. To be reimbursed, grantees must 1) have project areas/ activities inspected by a CSFS forester who confirms activities align with the approved scope of work; 2) submit accurate documentation of activities; and 3) meet minimum match requirements. Project eligibility is determined at the time of application submission and all funded projects go through an additional refinement of the scope of work with local CSFS foresters before official awards are made. Because of the reimbursement

process, capacity monitoring can leverage these reimbursements as check-ins for progress made on the scope of work, thus enabling the CSFS to better track capacity grant impacts.

Effectiveness is assessed for Fuels & Forest Health grants using on-the-ground monitoring similar to the [USDA Forest Service](#) Forest Inventory & Analysis (FIA) program. Capacity projects, however, require a different set of monitoring questions and assumptions than fuels projects to understand effectiveness. Where fuels projects can be measured by well-established metrics related to stand structure, including composition, size-class distributions, fuel loading and fire behavior metrics, etc., measuring the impact of projects that focus on increasing community capacity to plan and implement projects is less straightforward. Capacity projects can cover very different types of investments, from purchasing mulching equipment to funding personnel such as an outreach coordinator for fire and fuels reduction education, each of which could be assessed for impact differently. Further, varying community and organizational contexts (e.g., culture or access to information) may call for different measures of success. Although other capacity grant programs exist, there are no standards for reporting and monitoring due to the highly localized, project-specific nature of these grants, and thus a clear monitoring protocol for FRWRM Capacity Grants has yet to be developed.

Development of recommendations

Recommendations were developed iteratively among the team of authors in phases, drawing on evidence generated through 1) a preliminary assessment of the FRWRM Capacity Building funding track, 2) a review of grant programs focused on or inclusive of capacity funds and 3) observations made through reviewing the FRWRM Capacity Grant applications. The first phase was a preliminary descriptive assessment led by the CSFS using past applications from all grantees as the primary data source; this was complemented by a review of FRWRM grant descriptions and informal discussions with both grantees and other CSFS personnel (see more detailed methods in Appendix A). To maintain a focus on key observations and recommendations, the detailed assessment that informed the recommendations is included in Appendix A. A few key observations are summarized here for context.

Between 2017 and 2024, FRWRM appropriated \$5,308,101.91 to 47 different capacity projects across the state, with the total awarded funding per year ranging from \$40,000 in 2019 (supporting one project) to \$3,241,936 in 2023 (supporting 21 projects; see Table A5 in Appendix A). The assessment found that FRWRM Capacity Grants are versatile and have supported a variety of activities, ranging from \$3,000 to over \$520,000 per award. While “capacity” was initially limited to equipment purchases like woodchippers for fire protection districts, legislative language was adjusted in 2021 to allow support for other kinds of capacity, like personnel (e.g., outreach coordinators for wildfire education) and contracting services (e.g., to support planning or community programs like Chaffee Chips in Chaffee County). Two projects also included awards for events and training, in combination with personnel or contracting services. After 2021, many grantees received awards supporting combinations of each kind of activity (Table A6 in Appendix A). Not surprisingly, equipment purchases represented the majority of funded projects (57.4%), but the median award amount for equipment-only projects was low compared to projects that funded other kinds of capacity, such as personnel or contracting (Table A6).

The assessment also found that reduced match provisions associated with SVI areas appear to be underutilized (Table A8). Since incorporating the SVI geospatial layer into the grant program in 2021 to offer reduced match requirements for qualifying jurisdictions, there has been a slight upward trend in organizations accessing reduced match requirements, but the vast majority (>70%) of successful applicants did not request reduced match even if they qualified. The reasons for this are unclear but could signal a need for a more concentrated effort to highlight this aspect of the FRWRM grant program to support an equitable process for SVI-qualifying communities and applicants.

Through document review, the preliminary assessment found that current reporting structures for FRWRM Capacity Grants are uneven and largely limited to project reimbursement records (grantees have the option of reporting on a few metrics when they submit for reimbursement) (Table A9). Reimbursement requests do not assess whether projects have met stated goals. Further, reimbursements may occur early on in a project, as is the case for equipment purchases, thereby providing an incomplete picture of whether and how capacity funds have had an impact within their local context. There is a final report that requests project outputs like maps, photos, equipment purchased, acres planned and positions supported (Table A9). However, not all grantees complete the final report, and equipment-only awards (the majority of awards by percent of projects) do not require final reports at all. In discussions with grantees conducted by the CSFS, recipients emphasized the need to streamline reporting formats to minimize the burden on recipients, particularly for small (often equipment) grants. Thus, existing reporting could do more to enforce final reporting requirements and evaluate the outputs and outcomes of funded activities in a streamlined way, such as identifying those metrics that will be tracked at the beginning, which establishes focus for applicants earlier in the process. There is a need to revise reporting mechanisms for this program to ensure that all types of capacity grants—whether focused on equipment, staffing, planning or outreach—are evaluated in a way that better reflects their effects and community impacts.

In addition to drawing recommendations from the preliminary assessment, we reviewed available information about other grant programs funding capacity building across the U.S. (Appendix B) and had conversations (n = 4) with grant administrators to hear lessons learned from reporting. We share the frequency and types of reporting and what grantees are asked to report on in Table B1 and reference these programs as appropriate throughout the recommendations.

In a third line of inquiry, we completed a detailed review of the FRWRM application, scoring and selection materials and processes to suggest recommended updates (See Appendix C). Lastly, the team of authors met semi-regularly from late 2024 through early 2026 to share insights, review materials and co-develop the recommendations.

The remainder of this report outlines a broad set of recommendations for the CSFS to support both programmatic and project-level improvement and assessment, including monitoring and evaluation of the impacts of its capacity investments. They are suggestions only and are not intended to direct the efforts of program administrators but could provide a long-term roadmap for the CSFS to consider and build upon as resources allow. Our recommendations do not include tracking compliance.

Recommendations

1. Update preliminary analysis methodology and findings to strengthen conclusions

The preliminary assessment (Appendix A) provides an initial descriptive overview of the FRWRM Capacity Building funding track. This is a positive first step in understanding the portfolio of awards, and a proof of concept using a framework to characterize capacity investments, from which we learned a great deal. For example, we learned that the application of the Stages of Collaborative Readiness Framework may be better suited to characterizing investment purpose (“purpose type”) than capacity level, as we outline in Recommendation 3.

Our first recommendation, therefore, is to revisit the classification of capacity in order to improve the ability to draw conclusions from the analysis. While thoughtful, the qualitative classification of relative capacity is based on multiple variables requiring a great deal of subjective interpretation of documents (primarily

applications) that contained inconsistently reported information (see Table A3 in Appendix A). Further, the classification was developed and applied by a single coder. To address this, we recommend that future efforts to characterize capacity 1) reduce the number of variables considered in the capacity level indicator and focus on those variables that are most consistently reported across the applications; 2) use a small team of coders or other coding best practices to improve reliability of classifications (e.g., Miles et al., 2014). A simpler characterization of capacity would be more transparent and less prone to potential for autocorrelation when looking for patterns between capacity level and match, project scale, SVI and other variables of interest. Further, when revisiting this classification, it will be important to recognize that there are many ways to build capacity (Courtney et al., 2025), and capacity is a dynamic process and not static (Courtney, 2023). There may be nuances that exist for applicants, and this should be accounted for. For example, an applicant may not have many people on staff but may rely on a dense network of collaborators in their community to get work completed. Future characterization of capacity should attempt to take this into account.

Another adjustment that could enable stronger analysis in the future would be to decouple the combinations of award types (e.g., equipment and personnel, see Table A6) to examine the grant purposes individually. Lastly, future analyses could add statistical tests to descriptive and distributional summaries to improve the ability to draw inferences from the data to support program improvements.

2. Articulate how capacity investments support FRWRM goals

Our review of documents revealed that there are no clear statements distinguishing or linking the goals or intended outcomes of FRWRM Capacity Building Grants and FRWRM Fuels & Forest Health project grants.

We recommend that grant administrators articulate how their capacity investments help achieve the overarching FRWRM goals of 1) strategically reducing wildfire risk to values/assets in the WUI, 2) promoting forest health and restoring forests to historic levels, 3) encouraging the utilization of woody material generated and 4) aligning with county-level wildfire risk reduction planning and statewide wildfire risk and forest health goals. This articulation could be in the form of a separate goal or purpose statement for FRWRM Capacity Grants. For example, the National Forest Foundation’s Collaborative Capacity Grant has the following purpose statement:

“The National Forest Foundation’s Collaborative Capacity Program financial awards provide resources to support collaborative activities that increase wildfire resilience, recreation opportunities, forest health, and rural economies. Eligible efforts must describe how investments in collaboration will support a long-term strategy for achieving stewardship outcomes and how these outcomes benefit National Forest System lands.”

Alternatively, or additionally, grant administrators could develop a logic model linking capacity investment inputs to the intended outcomes and impacts of each of the four goals or the broader intent of the program. A logic model is a simple linear depiction of how a program’s investments (inputs) support different kinds of actions (activities) with immediate results (outputs) that contribute to desired short-, medium-, or long-term results (outcomes and impacts) over time (Thomas & Koontz, 2011). A less linear approach could also be taken through developing a systems or concept map linking inputs to outcomes and impacts; this may be more appropriate for FRWRM, given the different kinds of capacity grants (Patton, 2011).

The CSFS could use [The Colorado Forest Resilience Planning Guide](#) (Burri et al., 2025) or the Stages of Collaborative Readiness framework it is based on to articulate intended linkages between its investments in capacity to the activities enabled by funding to short-term outputs and medium or long-term outcomes and impacts. For example, FRWRM administrators could use the Guide’s Actions as early- and later-stage appropriate activities as a throughline for explaining how 1) investments in capacity (e.g., personnel to

convene collaborative activities) lead to 2) short-term outputs (e.g., MOUs, collaboratively developed plans and priorities or outreach activities). These might then lead to 3) short- or medium-term outcomes (e.g., increased partner engagement and trust, increased acres treated in priority areas and/or more cost-share uptake by landowners); and eventually to 4) long-term outcomes and impacts connected to FRWRM's goals (e.g., reduced landscape wildfire risk to values in the WUI) (Figure 1). For investments in equipment, the model might reflect how investments in equipment (like a chipper or air curtain burner) lead to short - and medium-term outputs (e.g., hours running equipment or piles generated) and eventually to outcomes (e.g., a community's increased ability to dispose of biomass) (Figure 2). An explicit connection between investments to outcomes for communities in SVI areas would support FRWRM's efforts to improve equitable processes and access to funds for those communities.

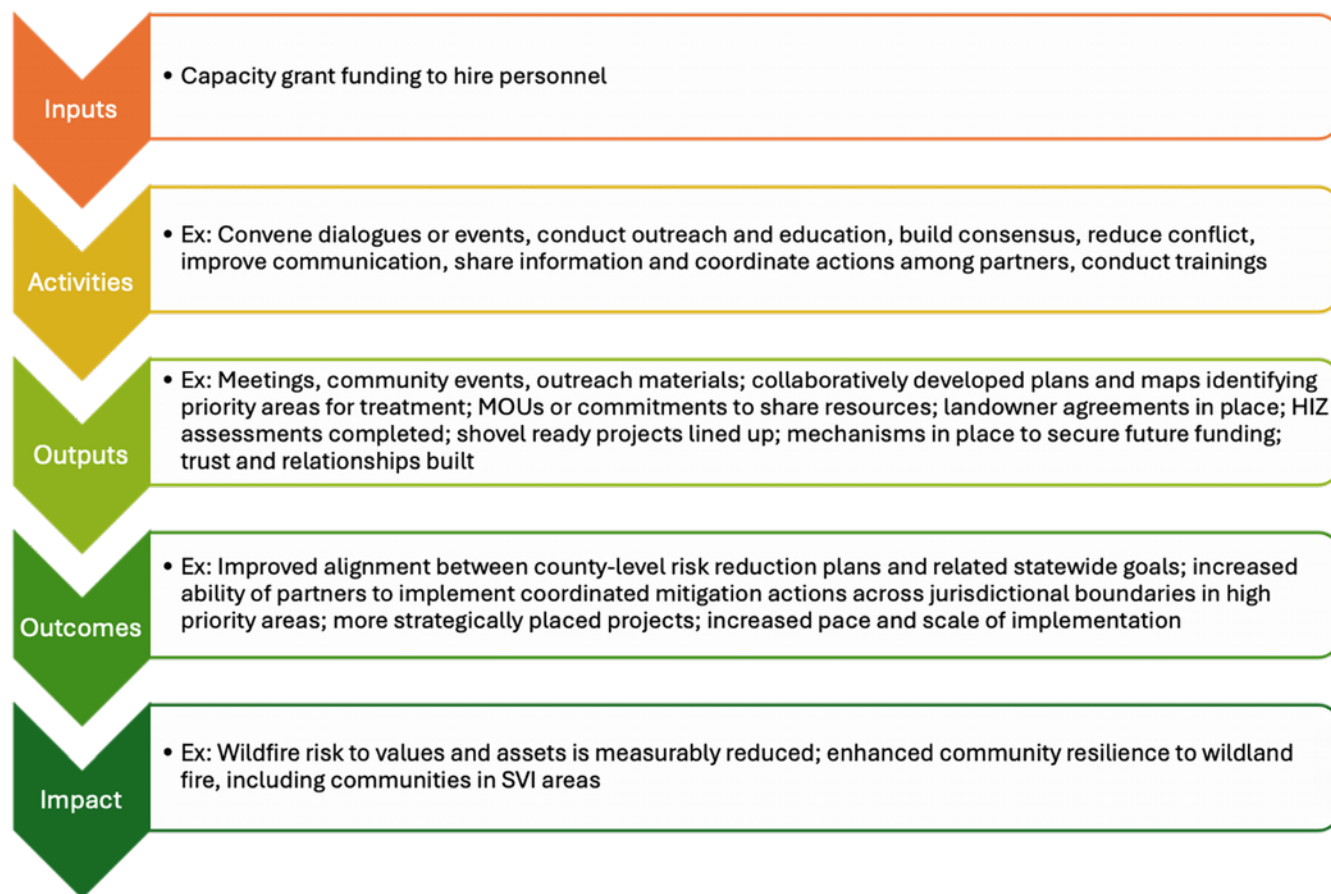


Figure 1. Example logic model linking investments in personnel to intended programmatic outcomes and impacts

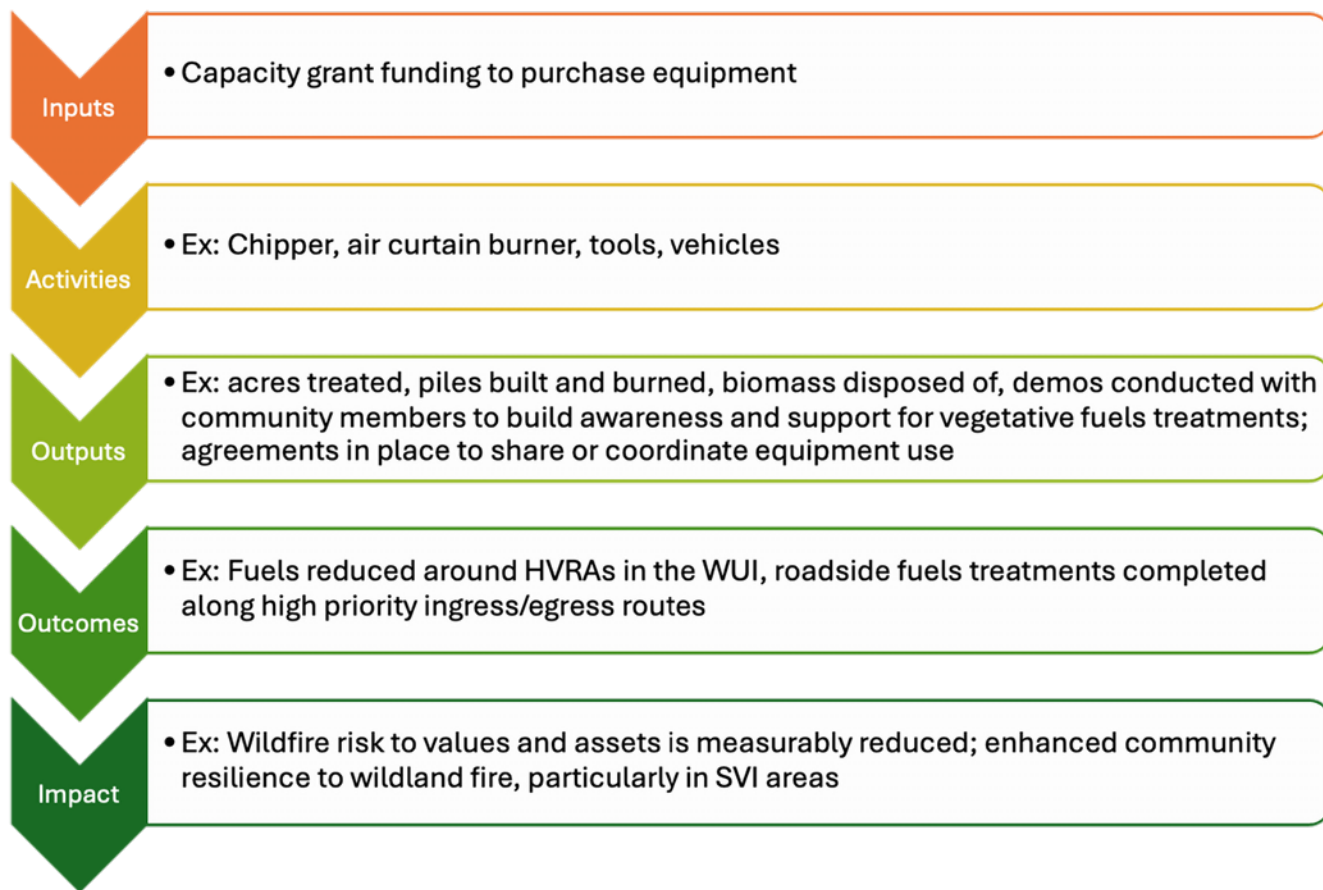


Figure 2. Example logic model linking investments in equipment to intended programmatic outcomes and impacts

With a better understanding of how capacity grants are intended to lead to desired outcomes, the CSFS could undertake a qualitative coding exercise of capacity grant applications and reports (where available) to identify themes and better understand how project and program goals align. Greater clarity around how the program invests in increasing capacity to achieve outcomes would help the FRWRM Capacity Building funding track and the CSFS demonstrate impact. At the same time, findings from the preliminary assessment suggest that a key strength of the FRWRM Capacity Building funding track is its flexibility in accommodating diverse local needs. **As such, efforts to articulate the logic of capacity investments should be designed to support, rather than constrain, that flexibility.**

One way to achieve this balance is through a simultaneous top-down and bottom-up approach, in which the development of overarching capacity grant purpose statements is informed by thematic analysis of existing and past capacity grant goals and activities. This approach would allow the CSFS to clarify program intent while remaining responsive to the range of functions and contexts reflected in the current portfolio. It could inform project selection criteria and clarify the selection process for the Technical Advisory Panel. It would allow grant administrators to provide guidance to applicants to effectively state their capacity project goals and answer other questions on the application (elaborated in Recommendation 8) to show alignment with program objectives, thereby making it easier to evaluate the potential impact of the application for community capacity (elaborated in Recommendation 3). Greater clarity could contribute to the development of more robust project type categories to link the purpose of the capacity investment to project goals and objectives (elaborated in Recommendation 3). Finally, it could contribute to more streamlined reporting through the development of more targeted measures of capacity investment impacts (Recommendation 4).

3. Revise categories for reporting

The preliminary assessment (Appendix A) analyzed three types of capacity investments: equipment, personnel and contracting (and combinations thereof, plus events and trainings, see Table A6 in Appendix A). These categories make sense from an accounting perspective but say little about the functions that the capacity investment is supporting, or how functions will lead to desired outcomes. Therefore, we recommend that FRWRM administrators revisit these categories per the previous recommendation to provide context for metrics and support interpretation of reported metrics.

Several frameworks support the identification of categories for community and collaborative capacity building (see Beckley et al., 2008; Cheng & Sturtevant, 2012; Mickel & Farrell, 2025; Paveglio et al., 2024). Community capacity can be defined as the ability of a group working within specific institutional and relational contexts to collectively mobilize, pool and leverage various capitals (human, economic, natural and social assets) to produce a desired change or outcome (Beckley et al., 2008). Collaborative capacity frameworks further refine capital into resources and inputs needed to sustain the work of collaborative entities, i.e., entities that combine the flexibility and adaptability of informal networks of individual organizations with the structure and durability of more formal organizations (Mickel & Farrel, 2025).

Discussions among co-authors arising from the preliminary assessment’s characterization of capacity revealed that applying a framework developed for a formal collaborative entity can be challenging for a grant program such as FRWRM, where some agreements support individual organizations, some support collaborative entities and some support a combination of both. To address that challenge, Table 1 adapts categories from the several frameworks including Collaborative Capacity (Cheng & Sturtevant, 2012), Stages of Collaborative Readiness (Huayhuaca et al., 2023) and the Collaborative Impact Model (Mickel & Farrel, 2025) to illustrate how investments in capacity can support different functions for both individual and collaborative levels of organization. Different combinations of capacities across these functions lead to different ecological, social, economic and political outcomes.

Table 1. Four broad types of functions supported by capacity investments exemplified at the individual and collaborative organization levels (adapted from Cheng & Sturtevant, 2012; Huayhuaca et al., 2023; Mickel & Farrel, 2025)

Function	Individual organization	Collaborative entity
Organizing and coordinating	• Skills/ expertise in organizational design, management, administration, or leadership • Capacity to participate in collaborative entities at any level	• Same skills/ expertise needed as for individual organizations, plus skills/ expertise in facilitation, conflict management, partner recruitment and management, information sharing and collective project coordination • Systems, infrastructure and equipment for internal and external communication and coordination

Function	Individual organization	Collaborative entity
Decision making, governance and strategic planning	• Skills/ expertise in strategic planning • Access to decision support tools and platforms to make strategic decisions • Capacity to participate in collaborative entities at a strategic or leadership level (i.e., to make decisions on behalf of the organization in a collaborative setting)	• Same skills/ expertise as for individual organizations, plus skills/ expertise in process design and decision making, developing and codifying collective purpose statements and goals, developing agreements and mechanisms for sharing resources, collaborative strategic planning and prioritization • Access to decision support tools and platforms to make strategic decisions in a collaborative setting
Acting	• Skills/ expertise in operationalizing goals, developing work plans, acquiring funding, allocating funds and personnel towards implementation • Capacity to carry out on-the-ground management activities • Capacity to lead or participate in community engagement and outreach • Equipment and infrastructure necessary to carry out actions	• Same skills/ expertise as for individual organizations, plus expertise/ skills in cross-organizational work planning • Same capacities, equipment and infrastructure as for individual organizations, plus capacity to acquire and share resources among partners for implementation • Tools and processes for sharing information about projects to facilitate cross-boundary implementation
Learning and evaluating	• Local knowledge • Subject matter expertise and technical skills (e.g., GIS, data management and analysis, progress tracking, ecological and social monitoring, reporting, policy frameworks and venues for advocacy) • Access to tools and platforms for data management and analysis • Capacity to lead or participate in social learning endeavors (e.g., field trips, trainings, workforce development) • Ability to apply learning to necessary adjustments and adaptations (e.g., change prescriptions, recruit new participants, or adjust goals)	• Same expertise and skills as for individual organizations, plus skills/ expertise in collaborative learning, effective communication to build internal and external legitimacy • Same access to tools and platforms as for individual organizations, plus tools and processes for data sharing/ integration • Opportunities to strengthen social learning through trainings, peer-to-peer exchanges, field trips, etc. • Capacity to lead and sustain long-term collaborative adaptive management processes with partners • Same ability to apply learning to needed adjustments and adaptations as for individual organizations

4. Develop a tailored menu of metrics

The preliminary assessment (Appendix A) found that obtaining reporting information on capacity grants can be a challenge, and grantees may lack capacity for detailed reporting to demonstrate outcomes, making tailored reporting important. **We recommend the CSFS offers a tailored menu of metrics for grantees to report on.**

Equipment purchases alone are relatively simple and concrete in terms of expected use (e.g., a chipper to offer community chipping services or equipment to conduct other implementation activities) but also lack requirements for final reporting. Personnel and contracting, or combinations thereof that include equipment, on the other hand, are more nuanced and require more context to understand their contribution to outcomes. Recommendation 3 suggests FRWRM administrators adopt functional categories such as those presented in Table 1 to help refine categories that could be used to contextualize and structure the metrics. In Recommendation 4, we provide tentative metrics that could be applied in different combinations or as pre-set menus to track project effectiveness and alignment with program objectives.

For simplicity, we describe metrics using two broad categories: the first focuses on equipment (which accounts for over half of total FRWRM capacity projects; Table A6 in Appendix A); the second lumps the categories of personnel and contracting into one category that captures the human resources and supplies/ services needed to sustain activities outlined in Table 1 (e.g., coordinating meetings, trainings, outreach, or technology and tools to support activities other than implementation) (Baxter & Land, 2023). Grantees would select applicable metrics that best exemplify their success (with support from the CSFS to select appropriate metrics for new grantees). This menu would allow the CSFS to track a larger set of metrics that reflect the broader outcomes of FRWRM investments, while providing grantees the flexibility to showcase project successes relevant to their project's specific goals and objectives.

Equipment

Current metrics collected through reimbursement requests and final reporting include several output-level metrics related to equipment, such as number of piles created (Table A9). The following are additional metrics for outputs and short- to medium-term outcomes of investments in equipment and the activities those investments enable:

Output metrics

- Number of hours of use
- Units of service delivered (e.g., # chipping days) or communities served
- Any documented outputs besides maps (already collected), including equipment logs, images, shapefiles, graphs, etc.

Short- to medium-term outcome metrics

- Contribution to number of piles burned
- Contribution to number of acres treated in priority areas
- Number of homes or structures hardened

We suggest a few additional output-level metrics that could be easily reported periodically to help the CSFS understand the extent of equipment use and utility and short-term progress towards goals. However, the more valuable metrics for showing effectiveness would be those associated with short- to medium-term

outcomes. While we recognize that metrics for equipment do not completely line up with those for Fuels & Forest Health project implementation, there are examples of crossover where equipment contributes to fuel reduction. For example, tracking contribution to piles burned shows more progress toward fuel reduction goals than contribution to piles built. Similarly, tracking acres treated in priority areas would better indicate effective treatment placement than just “acres treated.”

Human resources

Staff capacity is necessary to achieve shared goals and sustain momentum (Table 1). The most basic output metrics for investments related to human resources is a representation of the number of staff dedicated to wildfire mitigation, an important metric in determining capacity for wildfire mitigation and fuels removal (Courtney, 2023). Payroll is requested by the CSFS during reimbursement requests, and staffing increases (number of positions, position category, description and accomplishments) are requested with final reports (Table A9). Depending on how this information is requested, these items may provide sufficient data to assess how investments increase capacity. The following are metrics for the outputs and short- to medium-term outcomes of investments in Personnel/ Contracting and the activities enabled by those investments that could be added to or derived from information collected by the CSFS upon final reporting:

Output metrics

- Full-time equivalent (FTE) positions dedicated to wildfire mitigation related activities (can include any allowable expenses). For example, one person with half of their time devoted to this task would be reported as 0.5 FTE.
- Titles or roles of new hires or contracted positions
- Files or links to position descriptions for personnel hires and/or documented outputs generated through the grant such as MOUs, collaborative charters, plans, agreements, prescriptions, training materials, outreach materials, maps, images, etc.

Short- to medium-term outcome metrics

- Planning efforts initiated or completed because of the grant (e.g., CWPP)
- Number of engaged entities/entities targeted for outreach (quantified by type of person/organization, e.g., HOA)
- Number of events and/or number of hours of educational events, field trips or trainings
- Number of people trained
- Number of home ignition zone assessments completed

FTE dedicated to wildfire mitigation-related activities may be preferable to a headcount metric, as it could accommodate positions with multiple functions: For example, one FTE could be one full time employee 100% dedicated to wildfire mitigation, two positions with 50% of time so dedicated, etc. Understanding what those staff (or contracted positions) are doing is critical context for interpreting metrics, and so we also suggest gathering information on roles, position descriptions and accomplishments.

The kinds of activities and associated outputs and near-term outcomes will differ depending on the type of position supported by the FRWRM Capacity Grant. For example, a staff position conducting outreach to HOAs and individual homeowners, or landowners in rural communities, is a critical step toward the long-term outcome of increasing the capacity of people and communities to adapt to wildland fire. In the short term, progress can be measured by having grantees report outputs like outreach materials developed, or short-term outcomes like the number of landowners engaged through the program of work led by this role.

In areas lacking a CWPP or other collaboratively developed plan for wildfire mitigation activities, planning and prioritization efforts (staff- or contractor-led) during the grant period can be a critical output demonstrating local capacity development that increases the likelihood of successful outcomes for future implementation projects (Cheng & Sturtevant, 2012; Courtney et al., 2025; Huayhuaca et al., 2023). Additional planning efforts outside of CWPPs that could be included within this metric are hazard plans, evacuation plans (where mitigation needs are identified), Firewise community designation, management plans and stewardship agreements. Knowledge of whether and how FRWRM Capacity Grants have supported planning activities could be particularly valuable if the same grantees (or partner entities) later apply for FRWRM Fuels & Forest Health project grants within planned priority areas. However, these metrics on their own do not tell the whole story (even when supplemented by narrative question prompts, see Recommendation 7). To better illustrate how these outputs and near-term outcomes translate to longer-term outcomes and impacts of FRWRM's capacity investments, we have combined existing and new metrics and organized them around broader categories of functions from Recommendation 3 (Table 2). These functions can add context for making sense of reported metrics related to different project types. For example, what roles are fulfilled by new hires or contracted positions? Are those roles supporting core organizational functions, planning, community outreach, coordinated action, or learning and adaptation? Are there investments in equipment or contracts that support functions other than action, such as communications software or monitoring equipment? Investments in training or skill-building might pertain to any of these functions, or they could be grouped within learning and evaluating if preferred.

Table 2. Potential metrics that the CSFS does or could gather to assess outputs and outcomes of capacity investments in relation to community or collaborative functions that support program goals

Function	Potential metrics
Organizing and coordinating	• Full-time equivalent (FTE) positions dedicated to mitigation-related activities • Titles or roles of new hires or contracted positions – Roles contribute skills and expertise or lead activities related to organizing and coordinating, either at the individual organization or collaborative-level • Contracts for services or equipment purchases related to basic communications and coordination infrastructure (e.g., software to support outreach, meeting venue rentals, food, etc.)
Decision making, governance and strategic planning	• Titles or roles of new hires or contracted positions – Roles contribute skills and expertise or lead activities related to decision making, governance and strategic planning • Planning efforts initiated or completed because of the grant (e.g., CWPP) • Number of acres planned in priority areas • Shareable files or links to position descriptions for personnel hires and/or outputs generated through the grant such as MOUs, collaborative charters, agreements, plans, etc.

Function	Potential metrics
Acting	• Titles or roles of new hires or contracted positions – Roles contribute skills and expertise or lead activities related to implementation or cross-boundary project actions (e.g., a forestry specialist hire) • Equipment purchased • Number of hours spent using purchased equipment • Number of piles created and burned; years created and burned; and types • Contribution to acres treated in priority areas (if applicable to capacity grants) • Type and volume of forest products generated and/or removed using the equipment • Use and value of any forest products generated • Number of homes or structures with new or enhanced defensible space • Number of homes or structures hardened • Sharable files or links to outputs including equipment logs, maps, images, shapefiles, graphs, etc. • Number of home ignition zone assessments completed • Number of outreach materials created and shared • Number of engaged entities/entities targeted for outreach (quantified by type of person/organization, e.g., HOA) • Number and hours of educational events aimed at increasing community buy-in to implementation • Sharable files or links to personnel descriptions for personnel hires and/or outputs, prescriptions, training materials, outreach materials, maps, images, etc.
Learning and evaluating	• Titles or roles of new hires or contracted positions – Roles contribute skills and expertise or lead activities related to learning and evaluation, like monitoring crews or GIS specialists • Sharable documentation and images of peer learning events supported; community surveys; monitoring protocols or results • Number of trainings and number of training hours • Number of people trained

5. Ensure consistency through application materials, selection criteria and reporting requirements

With clearer goals and expected outcomes in place for FRWRM Capacity Grants established, and metrics identified that can better assess how investments support program goals, we recommend that the **CSFS review application materials, selection criteria and reporting guidelines to ensure consistency**. This will make the application process clearer for both applicants and administrators.

For example, grant administrators might consider re-assessing which metrics make sense as crossovers for equipment and removing or making optional those sections of the application that may not be relevant for capacity grants, such as the question about the physical attributes of the project landscape. Retaining these questions as optional may be helpful for applicants seeking funding to purchase equipment or supporting personnel for a specific project; the CSFS should provide guidance to applicants on how answering optional questions could strengthen their proposals, potentially making them easier to score. Several parts of the FRWRM application are not relevant to capacity grant applicants (see Appendix C for more specifics):

- "The Colorado Wood Utilization and Marketing program has been contacted..."
- "Forest products and/or wood utilization businesses have been contacted..."
- "A plan for utilizing forest products/woody materials generated..."
- "Estimated cost per acre"
- "Will this project involve a contract with an accredited Colorado Youth or Veterans Corps..."
- Section M, "Forest Product Utilization and Slash Management"

Instead, focusing more questions on how the project's goals align with FRWRM's capacity goals, or how the project will increase community capacity to do future fuels or forest health projects would be beneficial.

While capacity proposals are scored separately from the Fuels & Forest Health project proposals, the criteria are the same for both types of applications (aside from Section K, which is specifically about capacity). While some criteria may be appropriate for both (e.g., ensuring that applicants meet eligibility requirements and that proposals align with FRWRM's intent), other criteria may be less helpful for the grant selection committee for capacity grants (e.g., # of acres treated for state money spent). As stated above, naming it "contribution to # of acres treated" would be clearer, and should be optional for capacity grantees since the nature of the projects can vary widely. Further, a clearer articulation of how investments lead to outcomes could help FRWRM grant administrators identify a subset of criteria to support the selection of the strongest proposals, where investments in capacity are most likely to yield the intended outcomes of FRWRM.

Performance and progress reports are critical for grant program accountability. In addition to ensuring compliance with applicable rules and regulations, performance/progress reports should serve the CSFS by showing the project is on track, meeting its goals, providing data on key metrics and demonstrating progress towards the project's anticipated outcomes (Brown & Lee, 2025). Application materials and guidelines should encourage applicants not only to state clear goals and objectives for their proposed activities, but also to consider how they will know if they are successful. If adopting the tailored menu of metrics (Recommendation 4), then introducing these metrics early is advised. Otherwise, grant administrators may want to seed application materials with suggested quantitative and/or qualitative metrics or leave it open to the discretion of applicants; either way, the specifics of reporting should tie back to the specifics of the approved agreement and proposal (Brown & Lee, 2025).

6. Increase frequency of reporting/check-ins

We recommend more frequent check-ins with grantees. Currently, capacity grant recipients submit only final reports, often 3–4 years after the grant is awarded, and equipment-only grant recipients often skip final reporting entirely. That lag time or outright lack of data can lead to challenges for grantees in recalling information and for grantors in demonstrating accountability and outcomes. Adding interim reports at an interval that is feasible for grant administrators (e.g., 6 months or annually) would be less onerous than some programs (like the Colorado Strategic Wildfire Action Program (COSWAP), which has quarterly reporting requirements), but frequent enough to allow grant administrators to be able to track progress and support grantees if they are facing challenges with their projects, for example. The National Forest Foundation (NFF) conducts check-ins every 6 months for its Collaborative Capacity program, as does [Wildfire Ready Watersheds](#) (administered by the Colorado Water Conservation Board). We recommend interim reports for all grant types, even if the award was used just to purchase equipment. These check-ins would provide a chance to gather information about how equipment or other investments were used, allowing grantees to record how they used the funds rather than waiting until years later when they may have forgotten key outcomes or impacts. This interim report could be a simple online survey, a 30-minute phone call or a short report. One way that the CSFS could make check-ins more accessible would be to employ the Technical Advisory Panel (TAP) to check-in with 5–10 past grant recipients throughout the year to assist in following up with grantees. Conversely, TAP participants could choose to review applications and/or check-in with past grant recipients to accommodate their busy schedules and capacity constraints. Common across the other capacity grants were reporting forms and regular check-ins to keep tabs on the work being done to better tell the story of the impacts the grant is having on communities.

7. Request a narrative final report

FRWRM's capacity investments are unique and context-dependent, making it difficult to show growth and impact through metrics alone. Smit and Wandel (2006) suggest that determinants of capacity should be identified by the community [or grantee] itself. **We recommend that a narrative (200 to 500 words) be required as part of the final reimbursement or closeout that details the accomplishments of the grantee,** especially since the metrics requested are not always provided by the grantee. This would allow grantees to describe their accomplishments and impacts in their own words or elaborate on determinants of capacity they find most appropriate for their context, regardless of whether it is captured by the menu of tailored metrics (Recommendation 4). Short narratives can provide important qualitative information on activities that may not be visible through traditional reporting metrics, which can improve understanding of how capacity grants make a difference for communities (Mickel & Farrel, 2025). Narratives can also be useful for storytelling and demonstrating the impact of investments to funders and the broader public. Prompts such as the questions suggested below will help keep responses on target.

Additionally, to reduce reporting burdens on grantees, the CSFS could offer grantees the option to have an exit interview instead of a written report. Other granting entities offer this option. For example, the NFF currently does this with 10–15 grantees per cycle, and an NFF grant administrator anecdotally communicated that it makes a big difference in their storytelling. Partners involved in interviewing Northern Colorado Fireshed Fund (also administered by NFF) capacity grant recipients noted it was a helpful opportunity to explain the value of articulating and reporting capacity investment outcomes, i.e., making the case for reporting to grantees. It does place additional work on the entity conducting the interviews to synthesize the information, and while this may not be overly burdensome for a national entity like NFF, the CSFS must weigh the tradeoffs of this activity on grant staff capacity. One way to make it more feasible for the agency would be to only offer this option to SVI recipients.

Potential narrative questions could include one or more of the following:

Interim reports

- Since the beginning of this grant agreement or the last update report submitted, what progress have you made toward your capacity project's goals, as described in the proposal or agreement? Please summarize the project progress for this period.
- Do you have any questions or concerns for us regarding your project's success?
- What do you still need to achieve desired outcomes?
- How has this funding helped you accelerate a process so far?
- Please share a success story related to your project this period, if applicable.

Final report

- Now that your project is complete, share a summary of your accomplishments and impact.
- How has the investment resulted in increased community or collaborative capacity to implement projects or otherwise achieve outcomes aligned with those of FRWRM?
- If you bought equipment for fuels reduction, how did you manage the biomass you generated?
- If applicable, share any anecdotal change in community perceptions or attitudes toward active forest management activities. This may include qualitative feedback from community members.
- Ask grantees to share about the impact of their project based on the type(s) of functions the investment supported (Table 1).
 - ◊ If the grant was used to convene partners, build trust or do community engagement, please describe the impact.
 - ◊ If the grant was used to develop plans, prioritizations, decision support tools or strategies, please share about the impact.
 - ◊ If the grant was used to support implementation across boundaries, please share about the impact.
- What challenges have impacted your work, if any? How is this funding supporting or helping you overcome some of these challenges?
- What strategies or solutions have you implemented to address these challenges?
- What key lessons have you learned from your efforts?
- How did the FRWRM capacity award lead to new partnerships or improve existing ones?

8. Improve guidance to applicants

We recommend providing improved guidance to applicants. All applicants, but especially those from underserved communities (identified by the Colorado Forest Atlas SVI layer), would benefit from additional support during the application process and in cases where their application is denied. As suggested by the preliminary assessment (Appendix A), more outreach may be needed to encourage applicants serving high SVI or low-capacity communities to take advantage of the reduced match option. We also recommend providing resources for applicants such as an application tip sheet and an example application. The tip sheet could be similar to the NFF's Matching Awards Program (MAP) application tip sheet (n.d.) that provides guidance on what reviewers are looking for. The example application could accompany the tip sheet to clarify expectations, featuring that year's application filled out with strong projects and high-quality responses. This could help 'level the playing field' for underserved, low-capacity communities and first-time applicants

(Cheng & Dale, 2020) and ensure they understand the expectations for FRWRM Capacity Grants. Informational webinars before the application due date could also be beneficial for first-time applicants that could use additional support and get questions answered quickly.

Additionally, **the CSFS could host kick-off meetings with grantees** to talk through what metrics the grantee would like to track, what makes the most sense and how to collect that data through the grant process. Individuals who run other grant programs shared how this can also result in cohesive storytelling for the program and provide a baseline understanding of grantee capacity. Conversations with other capacity grant administrators suggested that offering guidance and support to applicants and grantees not only makes the processes easier for them, but also improves the quality of applications and reports as well.

9. Communicate near-term program outcomes

To communicate the outputs and outcomes of the FRWRM program to a broad audience, **we recommend identifying those metrics for outputs and outcomes that could be incorporated into an online portal to illustrate near-term program impacts.** This portal might be static (like an ArcGIS online story map), or part of a more dynamic dashboard linked to the [Colorado Forest Atlas](#) or [Forest Tracker](#) (which tracks completed forest vegetation management projects across the state, including information on funding sources). This should happen after FRWRM administrators have re-evaluated and confirmed metrics for capacity investments, so as not to invest time and resources creating a tool before determining the best metrics to report. **We also recommend coordinating with grant administrators from the Colorado DNR** (e.g., COSWAP or Wildfire Ready Watersheds grantors at CWCB) to improve reporting alignment across state-level funding programs. In addition to streamlining potential reporting approaches, there may be opportunities to share capacity across the agencies within DNR. An online portal such as a dashboard can be an effective way to share program successes in a short amount of time. For example, the AIM program has a [dashboard](#) where they share their strongest metrics in an easily digestible way that shows funders how their program is making a big impact. Their dashboard includes total awards, total investments (\$), number of currently funded projects, new staff supported, total match and other metrics specific to the kinds of projects they fund (Figure 3). Many of these metrics could be applied to FRWRM Fuels & Forest Health and Capacity Grants, such as match. The CSFS already tracks match amounts, and percentages are a helpful way to tell the story of how the FRWRM funds leverage and expand funding available to do work. For example, FRWRM could share the total match amount (\$) that has been used in FRWRM grant projects, as well as the percentage that has been invested in SVI communities. Another example could be sharing this information through a factsheet like the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's [RESTORE Colorado grant program factsheet](#).

10. Implement longer-term assessment of FRWRM impacts

To fully understand the long-term impacts of the FRWRM program, we recommend that the CSFS either hire additional capacity to conduct program monitoring within its existing monitoring team or work with a third party to complete a program assessment that evaluates the outcomes of the Capacity Building and Fuels & Forest Health funding tracks separately or (preferably) together. For example, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation hired a third party to assess how the Innovative Nutrient and Sediment Reduction (ISNR) Grants Program investments advanced the program's objectives and created long-term impacts. Researchers used a mixed-methods approach including document review of grantee documents (e.g., grant proposals, interim/final reports) and supplemental documents (e.g., strategic plans); online surveys (e.g., collaborative partners); interviews (grantees and non-grantees); focus groups; implementation metrics; and geospatial data (Mickel & Farrell, 2025b). This resulted in a report synthesizing results of impacts and suggested programmatic recommendations. Similarly, the Colorado Forest Restoration Institute is supporting social and ecological

monitoring at the project and landscape level for COSWAP Landscape Restoration Investment program. This assessment includes both field-based and landscape-level ecological monitoring, as well as an assessment of collaborative readiness outcomes for the landscapes receiving investments. While third party evaluations are ideal, an assessment led by the CSFS monitoring team may be the most flexible and economical approach. Should the CSFS lead this assessment (and capacity allowed), the monitoring team could follow up with select grantees after grant close-out to ask about longer-term impacts, similar to its approach to follow up with the Fuels and Forest Health funding track. They might ask questions like: is the equipment still functional? How many days was it used this year?

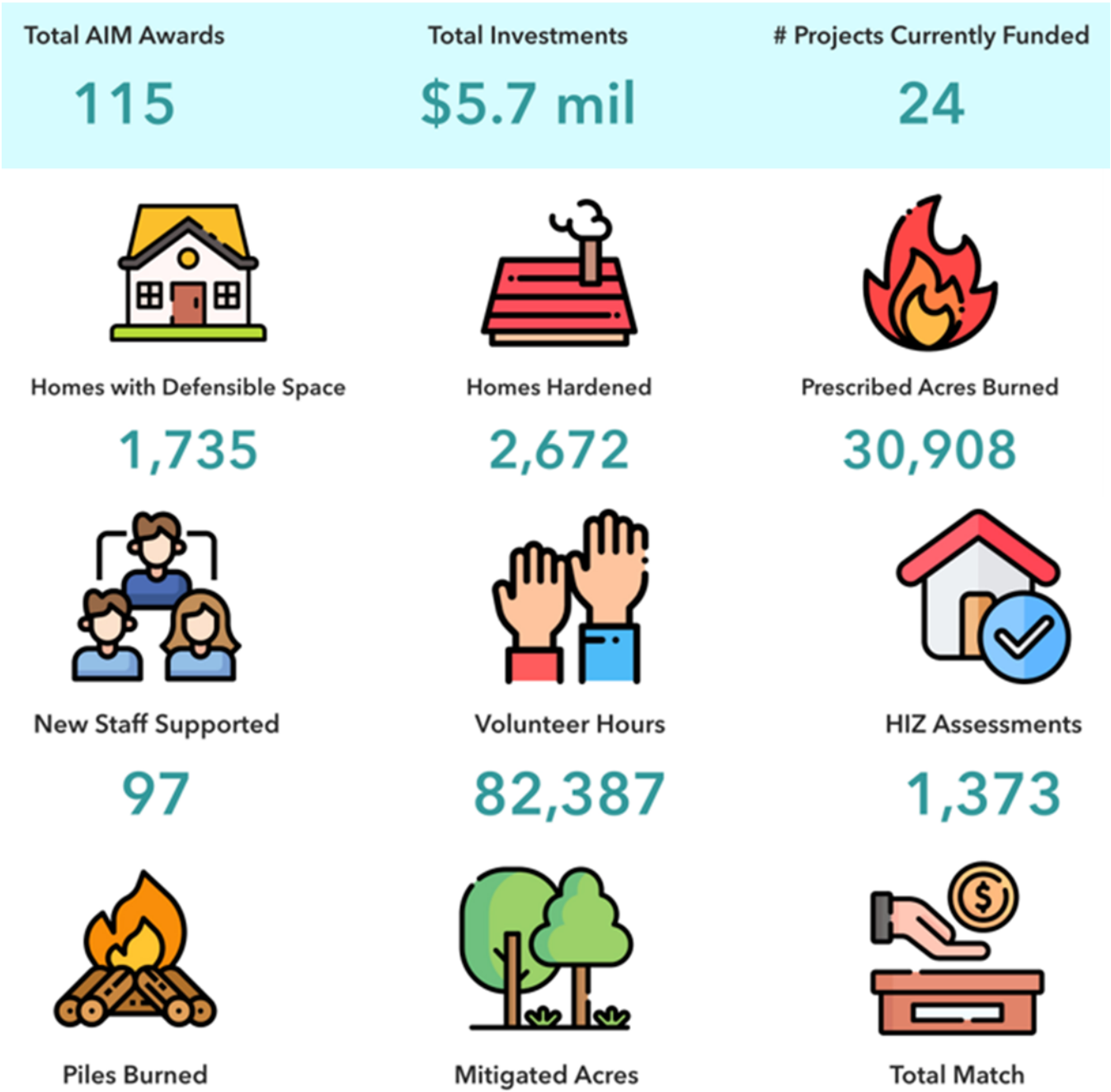


Figure 3. Example metrics from the AIM grant

Further, we recommend the CSFS coordinates with other Colorado governmental departments and agencies offering grant programs that are commonly combined with FRWRM to fund projects (e.g., DNR’s COSWAP and CWCB’s Wildfire Ready Watersheds), as well as CSU Extension, to identify potential reporting efficiencies and shared metrics of interest across programs to track complementary project and policy outcomes. This recommendation may be a bigger lift but could avoid redundancy and present opportunities to leverage capacity for grant program evaluation, which can lead to more strategic use of funds and effective storytelling about program impacts and outcomes long-term.

Conclusion

In this report, we drew upon a preliminary analysis of the FRWRM capacity program, available information about other capacity grant programs, and information gathered by examining the FRWRM application and scoring materials. Together, these sources of information highlighted several opportunities to strengthen the program, including clarifying program goals, improving reporting approaches and strengthening alignment across program components. The recommendations presented are intended to address those opportunities.

We provided 10 recommendations to the CSFS to improve program clarity, reporting and impact. Our first recommendation is to strengthen future analyses by revisiting the classification of capacity levels to reduce subjectivity and increase the ability to draw inferences from the data. Our second recommendation is that grant administrators articulate how capacity investments have contributed to the goals of FRWRM, using purpose statements, logic models or other means to create linkages between investments, project outcomes and program outcomes. The third recommendation builds on this by suggesting a shift toward categorizing capacity investments based on the organizational and collaborative functions they support and linking those functions to metrics that capture outputs and outcomes with sufficient context to connect to broader program goals. Recognizing the challenges of reporting and the need to minimize burdens on grantees, we recommend developing a tailored menu of metrics in Recommendation 4 to streamline reporting, increase the relevance to the goals of the projects and maximize the value of the information captured.

Recommendations 5 through 10 focus on improving program alignment, communication and long-term impact. These include improving alignment among application materials, selection criteria and reporting requirements (Recommendation 5); more frequent check-ins with grantees (Recommendation 6); narrative reporting and exit interviews to capture context-dependent impacts (Recommendation 7); enhanced guidance and support for applicants, especially from underserved communities (Recommendation 8); communication of near-term outputs and outcomes through an online dashboard (Recommendation 9); and planning for longer-term assessment to support strategic use of funds and impact storytelling (Recommendation 10).

Together, these recommendations aim to enhance the clarity, effectiveness and strategic impact of FRWRM Capacity Grants while maintaining the versatility and flexibility the program’s diverse grantees need and appreciate. They are intended to create a throughline from the application to selection to reporting and assessment processes to encourage a holistic approach for both grant administrators and grantees to achieve program goals.

Finally, we recognize that action on these recommendations will be shaped by the capacity and resources of the CSFS Monitoring Program. Further, the CSFS must balance information needs to assess outcomes with grantees’ desire for reasonably straightforward and uncomplicated reporting. We reiterate that these recommendations are intended as practical options for how the CSFS may strengthen its ability to track and communicate FRWRM capacity outcomes over time. As noted in Recommendation 10, there may also be opportunities to enhance coordination with other Colorado state agencies or units with programs related

to forest health, wildfire mitigation and community resilience efforts, which could support more consistent approaches to capacity building and impact assessment across initiatives. Within the CSFS, the agency may consider opportunities to expand internal capacity, potentially through additional funding, reallocation of existing resources, or strategic staffing approaches. For example, the monitoring program could consider permanent positions to support these recommendations or look toward hiring additional student intern support through the CSFS Internship Program, a strategy that continues to build upon existing experiential learning opportunities within the CSFS. Some tasks may be better suited for CSFS student interns, such as periodically tracking and (re)coding grants, while other recommendations are better suited for permanent CSFS employees in the short term. Long-term hiring of an FTE to support capacity monitoring may be warranted, but will be dependent upon funding, buy-in from grantees and monitoring program developments for the CSFS over the next few years.

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Appendix A. Preliminary Assessment of FRWRM Capacity Grants

Methods

To address the first question (understanding the allocation of FRWRM capacity funds through 2024), we performed a descriptive assessment by reviewing the past applications from all Grantees (n= 47). We collected basic grant information (e.g., grant cycle), as well as more complex information such as purpose or use of the grant, and the metrics that grantees self-reported on (e.g., hours logged using equipment; Table A1). The classification system for Type of Organization was based on the applicant organization and was categorized based on their primary organizational jurisdiction (Table A2). The “County Program” label was reserved for applications submitted by county representatives that did not clearly align with the other jurisdictional categories (e.g., conservation district, city). The Purpose and Use (henceforth Purpose) category was designated based on the three uses of Equipment, Personnel and Contracting, and all combinations of the three (as well as a subcategory of “trainings and events” that did not appear as a stand-alone Purpose type). Project Scale was categorized based on the maps provided in the application showing the project areas (e.g., large boundaries such as fire protection districts or county, and focused project sites; Table A2).

Table A1. Information collected from past grantees

Type of information collected	Name of information	Details
Applicant information	Year awarded	Year date
	Grant cycle	Grant year
	Application number	Number
	Project name	Name of the project being funded
	Project scale	Two categories
	Purpose and use of the grant funds	3 categories plus combinations
	Organization	Applicant organization
	Organization type	Nine categories
	Award amount	US dollars
	Award end year	Year date
	SVI area inclusive	Yes/no
	SVI area amount of total project area	Little, Partly, Predominantly, or Completely
	Community-based collaborative	Yes/no
	Percentage of annual award	% of total provided to FRWRM capacity in that year
	Estimated number of homes affected	FRWRM Capacity project anticipates impacting X number of structures/homes in project area
Existing reporting metrics	Number of acres in planning area	
	Number of acres treated each year of the project	

Table A2. Categorizations developed to identify types of applicant organizations, grant purpose and project scales of FRWRM capacity investments

Information	Categories	Description
Type of organization applying	Academic	Related to an academic institution, i.e., a university
	City or municipal	City or other municipal government, i.e., town or consolidated city/county
	Collaborative	Entity or organization consisting of representatives of different organizations and/or interests
	Conservation district	Conservation districts, a local government entity. For example, Larimer County CD
	County program	Application on behalf of a county program
	Fire protection district	Independent cross-jurisdictional local governments formed to address wildfire suppression and mitigation, among other emergency services
	Homeowners association	Application on behalf of homeowner's association
	Non-profit organization	Application on behalf of non-profit organizations that do not fit other categories,
	Other	Do not fit other categories and are not recurring, i.e. ranches and Tribes
Purpose	Equipment	The grant went primarily to funding equipment purchase(s)
	Personnel	The grant went primarily to funding personnel time for planning, etc.
	Contracting	The grant went primarily to hiring a contractor
	Combination	The grant was used for a combination of the three, plus combinations including trainings & events
Project scale	Large jurisdictional boundary	Large area such as a fire protection district or county
	Specific project area(s)	Small, specific project location

Wildfire mitigation needs vary across the state, and communities face different challenges depending on their resources and readiness (Courtney , 2023; Courtney et al., 2025). To support an equitable process for applicants from SVI-qualifying areas, and to be able to eventually assess changes in capacities to implement projects in the future, we need to characterize relative capacity of organizations applying for FRWRM Capacity Grants. As illustrated by the variety of organization types in Table A2, applicants can bring a wide spectrum of functions, resources and pre-existing capacity to the table. These organizations are generally working to build capacity in local communities and are often integral members and partners of their communities.

To characterize relative capacity, we adapted elements of the Stages of Collaborative Readiness Framework (Huayhuaca et al., 2023), which was developed to link capacity to functions and outcomes of collaborative entities across four nonlinear stages of development (gathering partners and creating shared vision, planning, coordinating implementation, and adapting and scaling up or out). These stages were altered to compare the relative capacity of the grant recipient organizations, some (but not all) of

which were collaboratives (Table A2). Grantees' organizational capacity was assessed using a multi-faceted, qualitative approach (Table 3), considering factors such as the number of partner organizations, staff size, funding match sources and match amounts. We used the factors in Table A3 to place organizations in different levels of capacity, and based on a qualitative distinction emerging between stages two and three (of collaborative readiness), we assigned organizations in levels one and two to a "low" capacity category, while levels three and four of collaborative readiness were assigned to a "high" capacity category. This binary classification emphasizes the relative capacity of applicant groups and helps contextualize differences in award patterns.

To build recommendations from the assessment, we also had conversations (ranging from 15 to 90 minutes) with CSFS personnel, past grant recipients and applicants, and social scientists (Table A4).

Table A3. Indicators of organizational capacity and rationale

Indicator	Low	High	Rationale
Levels of partnerships	Fewer partners in number and diversity	Relatively more, diverse partners	Low cap. orgs. have not established a large network, as higher cap. orgs. with a larger footprint and reach for relationship building across sectors.
Past projects (Size, type, #)	Usually none to few, sometimes looking to complete their first	More projects completed, including larger ones	Low cap. orgs. often forming around an idea, developing strategic planning, and potentially running "pilot projects". High cap. orgs. often building a portfolio of completed projects, sometimes including large ones.
Personnel (# and types of roles)	None to a few coordinators	Coordinator(s), admin. specialist(s), forester(s) and seasonal field employees	Low cap. orgs. often have roles related to setting up, planning and relationship building like coordinators, whereas higher cap. orgs. often have roles related to action and project-oriented work, and operational facilitation
Funding match source	Volunteer hours, mixed sources, small grants	Mostly cash, and other, larger, grants.	Lower cap. orgs. often have less cash on hand, are prone to using volunteer hours and small grants. High cap. orgs. often have more cash on hand and the ability to procure and leverage other large grants.
Match	Often at 50% (or below)	Usually above 50%	With less access to cash, lower cap. orgs often offer minimum match. Higher cap. orgs. are more likely to leverage more cash, grants and other resources, asking only for what they need, often hoping that will increase the likelihood of award.

Table A4. Conversations by source to inform our recommendations

Conversation source	Count
CSFS personnel	7
Past grant recipients and applicants	5
Social scientists	3
Total	15

Assessment findings

General findings

In total, 47 grants were awarded under the FRWRM capacity program from its inception in 2017 through 2024, with the award amount totaling \$5.3 million (Table A5). There were large differences in the award amounts, which ranged from \$3,000 to over \$520,000. The median award was \$56,000, but there was wide variation upward, with the interquartile range of the median 50% of awards climbing to over \$140,000. This wide variation reflects the large variety of requests and grant purposes (Table A6). It suggests that FRWRM Capacity Grants serve as a versatile source of funding that can help span small infrastructure gaps (equipment) to bigger human resource gaps that affect implementation capacity.

Table A5. Number and total amount of FRWRM Capacity Grants awarded by year

Year awarded	Number of awards	Total awarded (\$)
2018	4	72,405
2019	1	40,000
2020	3	91,043
2021	6	236,084
2022	3	154,979
2023	21	3,241,936
2024	9	1,471,651
Total	47	\$5,308,101.91
Median	--	\$56,000

FRWRM grant purpose types

FRWRM Capacity Grants administered through 2024 covered a variety of purposes and combinations thereof (see Table A2). Note, prior to 2021, FRWRM legislation defined capacity as mainly equipment purchases to conduct fuels reductions, but since 2021, legislation clarified capacity to include resources and staffing, thus opening the door to other capacity requests. Many projects were multi-purposed with some projects emphasizing both events and trainings (a sub-category that did not constitute a standalone type of purpose). Capacity projects funding solely equipment purchases comprised 24% of all funds from 2017–2024 and 57% of all capacity projects (Table A6). Capacity grants requesting funding for personnel within grantee and supporting organizations accounted for 20% of total funding and 13%

of projects, while grants requesting contracting support made up 13% of funding and 4% of projects. The remaining 43% of funds and 25% of projects supported a mixture of activities (Table A6).

We also found that the majority of grants distributed were solely used for equipment purchases (57.4%); however, the median award amount for equipment was much lower (thus constituting more, but smaller, awards than other purpose types; Table A6). The purpose types “Combination” and “Personnel” were less prevalent and tended to be similar but had higher median award amounts than equipment purposes. Though only two grants were solely used for contracting, their large award amounts afforded them a relatively significant share of the distributed funds. Additionally, larger planning areas were more common for grants funding personnel, which often support capacity building for fuels mitigation across larger geographic areas, rather than localized treatment projects.

Table A6. 2017-2024 Summary of FRWRM Capacity Grants by purpose

Grant purpose	Number of projects	Total awarded	Percent of projects	Percent of total award
Contracting	2	\$658,750.00	4.3%	12.4%
Equipment	27	\$1,265,594.97	57.4%	23.8%
Equipment and contracting	2	\$303,430.00	4.3%	5.7%
Equipment and personnel	5	\$671,340.24	10.6%	12.6%
Personnel	6	\$1,077,373.00	12.8%	20.3%
Personnel/equipment/contracts	3	\$965,901.70	6.4%	18.2%
Personnel/events and training	1	\$277,500.00	2.1%	5.2%
Personnel/events and training/contracts	1	\$88,212.00	2.1%	1.7%

As shown in Figure A1, grantees with high and low relative capacity allocated a large share of funding to projects with all three primary purpose components. However, some distinctions emerged in project purpose based on the high- vs low-capacity designation. Higher-capacity awardees skewed toward contracting and equipment requests, while lower-capacity grantees emphasized hiring personnel. Independent of the distribution shown in Figure A1, single-purpose projects were substantially more common among lower-capacity grantees (72%) than among higher-capacity grantees (47%; Figure A2). Only high-capacity grantees received funds to conduct activities that included trainings and events (11.1%; Figure A2)

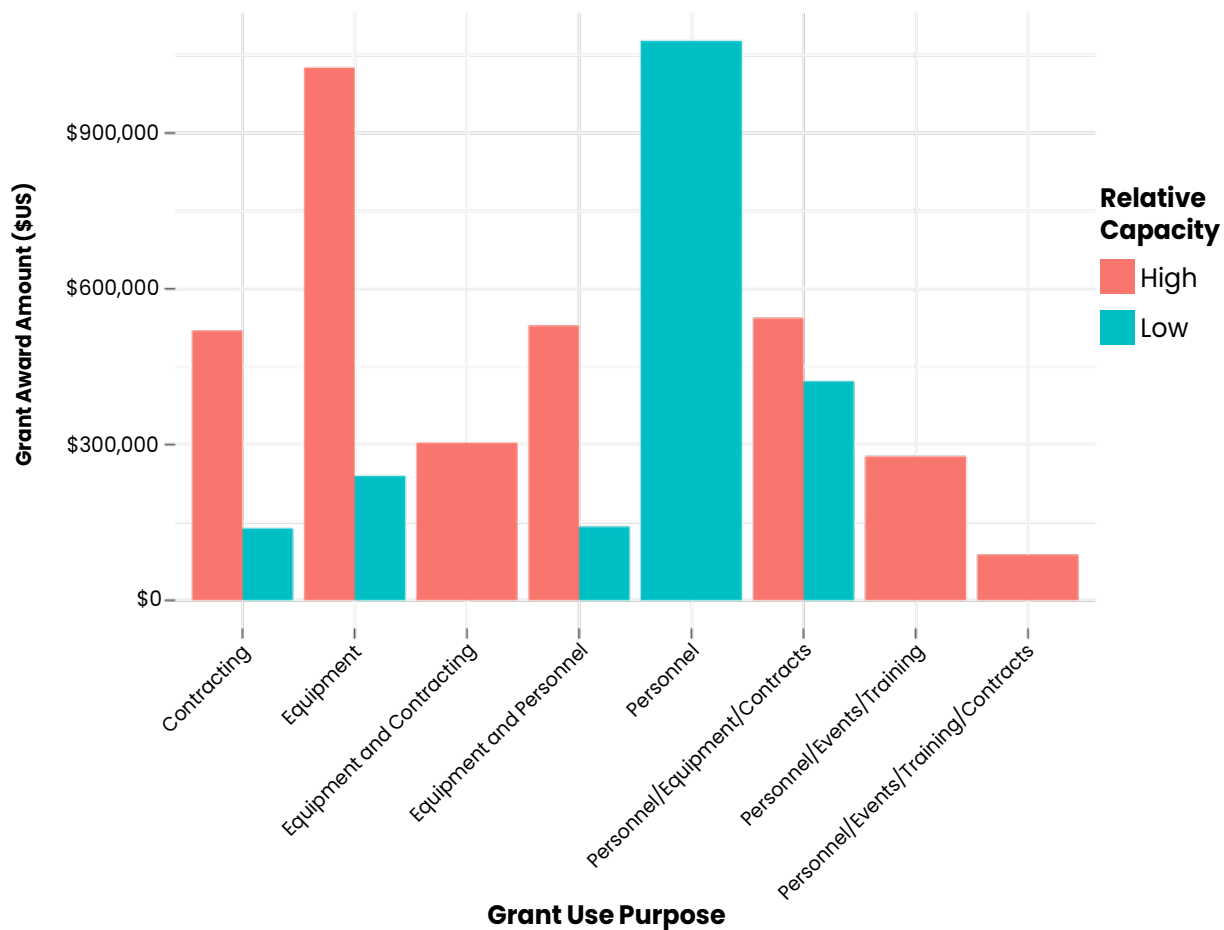


Figure A1. Grant Award Amount by Purpose of Grant broken down between high- and low-capacity grantees

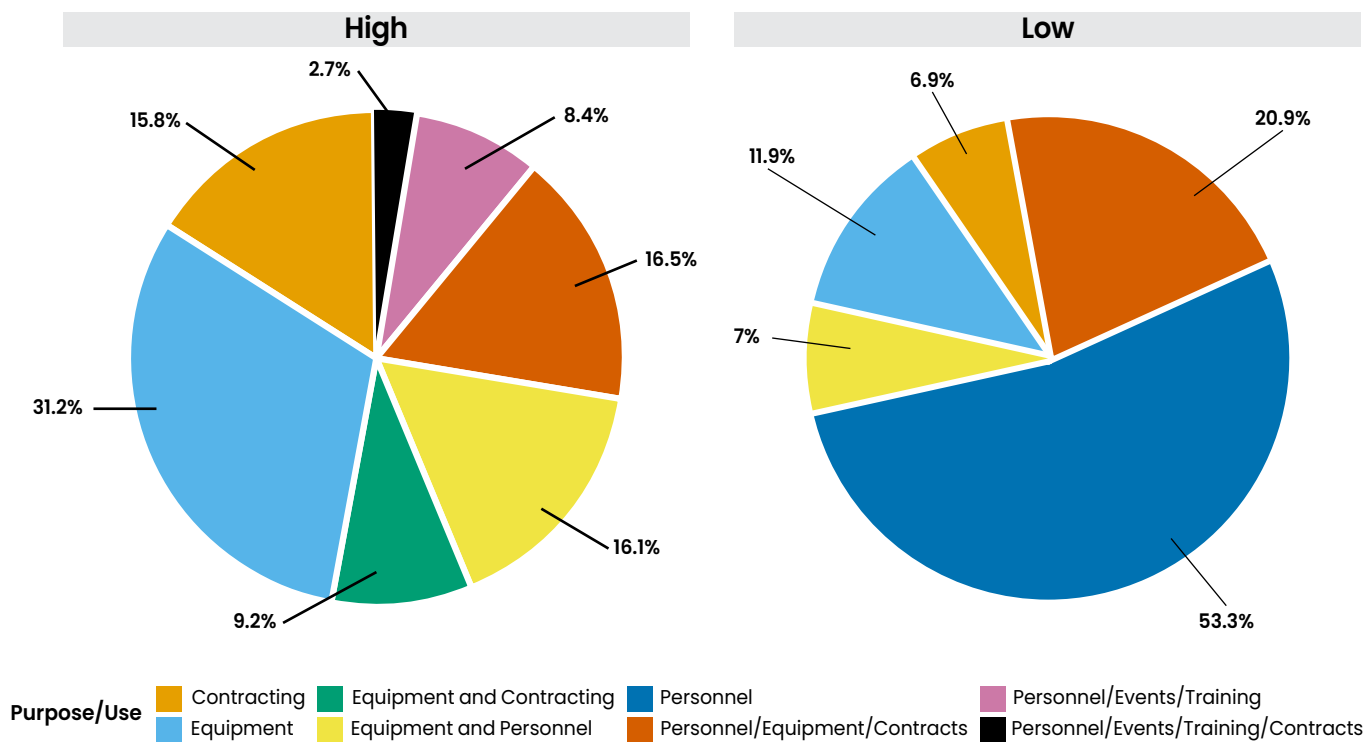


Figure A2. Percent of Total FRWRM Capacity Grant Allocations among high- and low- capacity organizations by grant purpose from 2017-2024

Interestingly, we noted that low-capacity grantees received fewer than half as many awards (of any purpose type) as high-capacity organizations, yet their median award amounts were more than twice as large (Table A7). This pattern may stem from the fact that many high-capacity organizations more frequently applied for equipment reimbursements, which tended to be smaller awards, and that low-capacity organizations more frequently applied for personnel, which tended to be larger awards (Figure A1). These patterns may reflect some combination of organizational capacity to obtain grants, their relative need for additional staff capacity and organizational readiness to put equipment to use for on-the-ground projects.

Table A7. *FRWRM Capacity Grant metadata by recipient organizational capacity level*

Capacity	Low	High
Number of awards	15	32
Total award amount	\$2,019,855.00	\$3,288,246.91
Median award amount	\$110,000	\$50,875.50

Match

The level of Social Vulnerability Index (SVI) engagement is also informative. FRWRM capacity grantees and representatives from partner agencies and groups have repeatedly emphasized the importance of the 25% match that the CSFS has been able to offer to qualifying applicants. In this way, the reduced match has been successful as a programmatic intervention, even if its adoption is limited. While approximately two-thirds of FRWRM capacity funding has gone toward projects that qualify for a reduced match, only about 10% of total awarded funds have gone toward projects that actually used the reduced match. This indicates that reduced-match eligibility does not necessarily translate into reduced-match participation. In fact, even when projects using a reduced match are included, the average match for SVI-qualifying projects exceeds 50%, suggesting that many grantees serving SVI-qualifying areas continue to meet or exceed full match requirements. The CSFS requires the presence of SVI-qualifying area within a project boundary to use a reduced match but does not specify a minimum required share. Among projects that did use a reduced match, approximately 75% included a relatively substantial share of project area that is SVI qualifying. The remaining projects, despite having a smaller SVI-qualifying area, tended to serve populations concentrated within SVI-qualifying geographies. It is important to acknowledge a limitation in evaluating this pattern, as project spatial scale is inconsistently defined across applications.

Partners and other actors have noted in discussions the importance of allowing in-kind contributions to count toward match requirements, particularly for applicants who possess the time, capacity and networks to pursue funding but lack sufficient financial resources. Thus, we would expect to see grantees in areas that qualify for reduced match to take advantage. As shown in Table A8, the distribution of entities receiving reduced or full match awards differs across years and by grantee capacity. Surprisingly, reduced-match projects first appear in the 2021 funding cycle and were initially awarded exclusively to high-capacity grantees. In later cycles, particularly in 2023 and 2024, reduced-match projects shifted toward low-capacity organizations, though they remained relatively few overall. In particular, the percent of high-capacity grantees claiming reduced match dropped to zero in 2024. Over all years, full-match awards continued to account for the majority of funding for both high- and low-capacity grantees. While there was a small upward trajectory in the proportion of FRWRM funds currently going to low-capacity

organizations that qualified for and received reduced match requirements (Table A8), this trend should continue to be monitored. It is unclear at this time why uptake of reduced match grants has been slow to catch on and remain low, even among lower capacity organizations who might benefit from it.

Table A8. Proportion of yearly FRWRM Capacity allocations (\$) 2018 through 2024

Year	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Low capacity-reduced match	NA	NA	NA	0%	0%	2.6%	9.4%
High capacity-reduced match	NA	NA	NA	20.5%	51.7%	8%	0%
Low capacity-full match	70.4%	100%	18.4%	0%	0%	35.7%	36.3%
High capacity-full match	29.6%	0%	81.6%	79.6%	48.3%	53.7%	54.3%
Number of capacity grants awarded	4	1	3	6	3	21	9

FRWRM Capacity Grants experience uneven reporting. Grantees currently have the option to report on a few metrics with reimbursement requests as well as the final report (Table A9). However, not all grantees currently complete a final report, and grants supporting just equipment purchases are not even required to complete one. In interviews to understand reporting preferences, we found that grantees who had purchased equipment were tracking hours logged on equipment (without a requirement to do so), suggesting this is easily accounted for. They also tracked tons of material chipped, masticated and/or burned. We found that grantees benefit from grants with self-guided expectations and a reliance on quotes and stories for monitoring. Grantees also stressed the importance of concise reporting and reasonable expectations. These findings suggest that obtaining sufficient reporting information to understand project or program outcomes will require streamlined reporting formats that minimize the burden on recipients, particularly for small (often equipment) grants, while still capturing the value of the investment for achieving desired capacity outcomes.

Table A9. Current reimbursement request and final report metrics, questions and other fields grantees have the option to report on

Metrics, questions, other fields	Reimbursement and/or final report	Description
Project map	Reimbursement; final report	Upload project map
Photos	Reimbursement; final report	Upload photos of the project
Expense tracking	Reimbursement	Spreadsheets and/or invoices of project expenses
Acres treated	Reimbursement	Acres treated by the project
Number of fuelbreaks	Reimbursement	Number of fuelbreaks created by the project
Number of homes with defensible space	Reimbursement	Number of homes that created defensible space for the project
Number and acres of trees planted	Reimbursement	Trees planted for the project

Metrics, questions, other fields	Reimbursement and/or final report	Description
Number of meetings and attendees at those meetings	Reimbursement	Meetings related to the project
Mileage	Reimbursement	Miles driven as they relate to the project and/or equipment purchased
Payroll	Reimbursement	Payroll for new position
Number of piles created and/or burned and the year created	Final report	Piles created or burned by the project
Amount and type of material generated and/or removed	Final report	Material generated and/or removed by the project
Use and value of any forest products generated	Final report	How forest products generated by the project were used
Equipment purchased	Final report	List the exact equipment purchased with grant funds
Number of acres planned, type and description	Final report	Planning activities
Number of positions, position category, description and accomplishments	Final report	New position(s) created with the grant funds

Taken together, these findings suggest that FRWRM Capacity Grants are a versatile funding source that grantees use for a wide range of activities to meet capacity needs. We experimented with adapting the Stages of Collaborative Readiness Framework to understand relative grantee capacity and identified adjustments needed to account for the types of organizational entities that apply for FRWRM Capacity Grants. By grouping grantees by capacity levels, we found that single-purpose projects (particularly personnel) were more common among lower-capacity grantees while multi-purpose projects were more common among higher-capacity grantees. We also found that even high SVI areas have not been taking full advantage of the reduced match. Additionally, the fact that reduced match seems to be infrequently used, especially by organizations/groups that would otherwise qualify, suggests a need for improved guidance to applicants to either broaden recognition that this is an option, clarify who qualifies for it and/or advertise this more widely via CSFS field offices. The reasons for applicant organizations not taking advantage of the reduced match are likely numerous and will need additional insight than what is presented here to articulate these reasons in greater detail. These findings also suggest that obtaining sufficient reporting information to understand project and program outcomes will require updated and streamlined reporting requirements. These findings have contributed to a set of recommendations for the CSFS to consider for improving the FRWRM capacity grant program and process as a whole, from selecting projects aligned with program goals to reporting to longer-term assessment of outcomes. With these recommendations, we seek to get the CSFS the information it needs while not burdening grantees with lengthy application and reporting processes.

Appendix B. Capacity Grant Programs

The authors reviewed grant programs similar to FRWRM that focused on or included funding to support capacity.

Table B1. Other capacity grant programs reviewed to inform our recommendations

Grant program	Frequency and types of reporting	Grantees asked to report on:
AIM Grant, Coalitions and Collaboratives	Grantees report quarterly, have Google forms, check-in calls and a final report	# new staff hired, # community volunteers, # volunteer hours, # of hardened homes or infrastructure, cubic yards of woody material removed, # of piles burned, narrative, attachment fields
Catalyst Fund	Annually	Grantees will be asked to provide a short written report at the conclusion of the grant period, to be accompanied by a very simple financial report. Additionally, two-year grants will be asked to submit a very brief interim report at the one-year mark. In the final reports, grantees will be asked to document how the Catalyst Fund grant was spent and evaluate its impact. Additionally, the network may track progress of funded partnerships for up to five years after the grant period through a short survey.
Collaborative Capacity Grant, National Forest Foundation	Every 6 months, final report (or a final interview instead)	Open-ended questions only but include: What measurable outcomes have resulted from your activities? (# people attended an event, # projects planned, etc.), attachment fields
Colorado Strategic Wildfire Action Program – Landscape Resilience Investments (COSWAP LRI)	Up to 20% of award can support capacity. Quarterly reporting throughout the term of contacted work (each award cycle is 3 years). A final report is required at the end of the agreement. Reporting information is gathered through a Google Form. DNR also requests before and after photos for projects.	Quarterly reports request a summary of project progress; total acres and acres by treatment type. Capacity-specific quarterly reporting includes a summary of planning progress, personnel directly supported with COSWAP funding (including roles); a field for concerns or questions directed at program administrators, and a field for additional information the grantee wishes to share. Final reports request a summary of work accomplished and impacts; a brief narrative about the experience of planning and implementing the project, including grant management and community engagement. It includes several quantitative metrics associated with acres treated (broken out by treatment type), including acres treated through matching funds and acres within priority areas. It requests a description of the type and volume of forest products and biomass generated and asks how biomass was managed. They ask about communities in proximity to the project and potential benefits to them. Moving into capacity-related information, they ask for the number of personnel supported with COSWAP funding. They request anecdotal information about perceived changes in community attitudes toward the project, and request a qualitative information, such as a brief success story, quotes, etc. They also ask for a narrative summary of the planning process, if funds supported planning.

Grant program	Frequency and types of reporting	Grantees asked to report on:
Idaho Collaborative Capacity Grant, National Forest Foundation	Every 6 months, final report	Cover sheet that includes all tangible outputs (# volunteers, # volunteer hours, # paid employee hours, # youth employed or engaged, miles of stream surveyed, acres of treatment planned, # people involved in monitoring, hours of monitoring, # of social, ecological and economic indicators monitored), and questions: Progress toward building local capacity related to employment and economic impacts: a) What steps has your organization been able to make towards the ancillary benefits of facilitating job retention and creation and/or business development in your region? As applicable, describe the use of local contractors, the production of local products, or other related outcomes. b) What benefits were economic benefits anticipated? What benefits have been realized? c) What obstacles did your organization experience on this topic and how did you address or overcome them?
NoCo Fireshed Fund, National Forest Foundation	Every 6 months, final report	Cover sheet that prompts grantees to report relevant outputs, similar to those listed for the Idaho example, but within a staged structure to help the grantees illustrate how they have developed as a result of the investment. It also includes a narrative summary, and attachment fields.
Wildfire Ready Watersheds	Every 6 months, final report	Summarize the work completed. Describe any obstacles encountered, and how these obstacles were overcome. Confirm that all matching commitments have been fulfilled. Include engineering reports/designs.

Appendix C. Review of FRWRM Capacity-Building Project Application

A co-author of this report examined the FRWRM capacity-building application in-depth. The following section highlights areas of the capacity application that could be changed to improve continuity throughout the application and alignment with CSFS reporting goals. We also offer a few suggestions for revising the scoring protocol for capacity grants.

Application

1. Categorizations

Different types of categorizations of capacity building appear in the application. In section K., equipment, increased staffing and planning efforts are all included. However, in section D., only equipment and staffing are mentioned. These categories should be consistent across the application, scoring and reporting.

D. Project Goals and Objectives

Clearly describe the goals and objectives of the proposed project and how they align with the overall FRWRM Program of reducing wildfire risk to people, property and infrastructure in the WUI, while promoting forest health and restoration and the utilization of woody material. Specifically address how the project will increase local capacity to plan and implement hazardous fuels reduction and forest health projects and to what extent. Capacity building actions must be tied to these goals and objectives and will need to be referenced later in this application.

Goals should be broad (i.e., increase community fire awareness and knowledge), while objectives will be more specific to the actions taken to achieve the project goals (i.e., host 5 wildfire-themed community events each year during grant period). In general, objectives are more numerous as multiple objectives may be created towards meeting your project's stated goals. Goals and objectives should be tailored to the type of capacity building request. For example, for an equipment purchase request, goals and objectives should be tailored to the specifics of what the equipment will be used for and not just the purchase of the equipment. For increased staffing, (i.e., wildfire outreach coordinator), indicate the specific goals and objectives for that position.

K. Capacity Building

Describe how the proposed project will enhance local capacity to reduce wildfire risk, encourage forest health and restoration projects and promote the utilization of woody materials. Be sure to tie capacity building efforts to the outlined goals and objectives described in section D. *Project Goals and Objectives* and current capacity described in section J. *Project Area Description and Current Capacity*.

Planning efforts should include specific and measurable activities such as the number of stakeholder outreach and engagements, the target audience and expected outcomes (i.e., development, mapping and prioritization of fuels reduction projects).

Proposals to support staffing should describe the position(s) and responsibilities and how efforts will support long-term capacity for planning and implementation of fuels and forest restoration activities.

Projects that include the purchase of equipment should describe any related training and safety measures to address safe use of purchase(s). If possible, quantify the annual anticipated use of equipment (i.e., run time, number of individual projects).

Successful applicants will be required to submit a more detailed description prior to a grant award from CSFS.

Figure C1. Screenshots from sections D. and K. of the FRWRM Capacity application.

2. Project summary

As stated in Recommendation 5, the questions in the project summary do not make sense for most capacity grants, as currently stated. We suggest organizing the questions in this section by ones that need to be answered by all applicants and ones that are mostly applicable to Fuels & Forest Health applications or equipment. Therefore, removing the following from capacity grant applications would be prudent.

- Estimated number of homes directly affected by this project
- Estimated acres to be treated annually with purchase, if applicable
- Estimated federal acres (if applicable)
- Estimated cost/acre
- Will this project involve a contract with an accredited Colorado Youth or Veterans Corps Association?
- Will this project protect water supplies?

3. Scientific support

In section E, the application prompts the use of “scientific support” in the response. It would be helpful to provide examples of scientific support, such as appropriate sources and how to find them. For example, do referenced plans developed using science-based frameworks count?

4. Forest product utilization and slash management

Section M.

Slash utilization is a main goal of the FRWRM program. Even with the statement, “...projects that won’t include a fuels reduction component...” We do not think it is necessary to ask every capacity applicant about this especially when many of the asks are for personnel to do outreach and education. If it must remain on the application because of policy, perhaps this question could be optional and then have current point values allocated for this section in the Fuels & Forest Health projects be allocated elsewhere.

Is there another question related to capacity that would be more helpful to ask?

A different question to ask could be, “How do you plan to measure the success of your project? Propose a short list of trackable metrics to report on during the lifetime of your grant.” This question could encourage grantees to consider tracking and reporting, hopefully making it easier for the CSFS in the future.

Scoring

Some parts of the scoring protocol could also be updated to be more relevant to capacity grant applicants.

E. Bonus points for protecting water supply: This does not make much sense for capacity applicants.

M. If section M is kept as is, we recommend that capacity applicants should not be required to reach out to CoWood or other local businesses about biomass utilization that would not happen from this project. We do not think it should be part of achieving a 5/5 score for this section.

N. Bonus points for partnering with Youth/Veteran Corps does not make sense for capacity building. It seems like those are usually used for implementation. Is there a different bonus point that capacity applicants could get instead?