



**RICHARD
KING MELLON**
F O U N D A T I O N

Request for Proposals:

Innovative Wood Products and Value Chains

Applications due:

Wednesday October 1, 2025, 12:00 PM EST



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Introduction to the Richard King Mellon Foundation

Since 1947, the [Richard King Mellon Foundation](#) (Foundation) has funded visionaries with bold ideas to advance prosperity in Southwestern Pennsylvania, and environmental conservation across the United States. The Foundation's 2023 year-end endowment was \$2.9 billion, and its Trustees in 2024 disbursed nearly \$155 million in grants and program-related investments.

The Foundation focuses its funding on six program areas: Conservation; Economic Development; Economic Mobility; Health & Well-Being; Organizational Effectiveness; and Social-Impact Investments. All six programs invest in transformative, evidence-informed solutions that align with the Foundation's strategy and contribute to positive change.

Conservation Funding Program

Since its founding, the Richard King Mellon Foundation has invested over \$1 billion to conserve and restore critical habitats in Pennsylvania and nationally, and to create livable communities in and around those critical habitats. In the process, the Foundation has helped to protect more than 4.5 million acres of land in all 50 states, with a particular focus on increasing public access and conserving working lands.

The Foundation's [Conservation](#) funding program's vision is to see wildlife flourish and people thrive in once-imperiled habitats across Western Pennsylvania and the nation. To this end, the Foundation invests in strategic land protection, stewardship, activation, and sustainable communities, including efforts to develop and deploy new technologies that foster livable communities and healthy natural systems.

Background: Working Forests Rely on Wood Products Value Chains

The conservation of working forests across the United States benefits when markets for wood products are robust. Demand for wood products is the basis for the complex forest-based economy that includes logging, milling, shipping, value-added production, and more. In this way, forestry practices—and the economic viability of keeping forests as forests—depend heavily on markets for the various types and grades of timber that America's working forests produce.

A thriving forest-products industry plays an essential role in the stewardship of American forests and is critical to ensuring the future of intact forested landscapes. In

turn, these working forests sustain some 950,000 jobs nationwide, generating over \$280 billion in annual GDP.¹

In recent years, however, many lumber markets have faltered, with negative consequences for forestry. Notable declines in demand for hardwoods have precipitated drops in lumber prices and the closure of numerous hardwood mills. For decades, the decline of the paper and pulp industry has driven down demand for small-diameter and low-grade wood, with negative consequences for the management of complex forest types. These and other market trends have driven forest conservation and management in the US toward an increasingly uncertain future.

The emergence of innovative wood products may be critical to halting and reversing the decline in lumber markets, and to reestablishing conditions that incentivize ecologically and economically viable forestry. Particularly where innovations create new uses for low-grade, low-value, and/or small-diameter timber, their adoption may help to resolve major challenges in the forest-products market. New markets for those lower-value logs would support a future in which sustainable timber harvesting continues to make economic sense for loggers, mills, and other businesses in the supply chain.

Innovation² in wood-based construction materials is producing an increasingly varied class of engineered wood products. Examples of innovative wood-based construction materials include mass timber; nanocellulose insulation, drywall, and particle board; biochar additives; and timber concrete composites. Two of the most well-known and widely-used wood-based construction products are types of mass timber: cross-laminated timber (CLT) and glue-laminated timber (glulam).

While promising in these respects, many wood-based construction materials face challenges related to development, adoption, and scaling. Many materials that might create new markets for low-value timber require further development, certification, and commercialization. Market-ready materials may benefit from technical support for the scaling of manufacturing, value-chain strengthening, and upskilling of workers in the forestry, manufacturing, and construction sectors. The most mature innovations

¹ Jagdish Poudel & Ram Dahal, "A comprehensive look at the forest products industry's economic contribution to the United States: Pre- and post-COVID analysis," *Forest Policy and Economics*, Vol. 172 (2025).

U.S. Department of Agriculture. U.S. Forest Service. "Forest Products". Updated 2024. Accessed at <https://www.research.fs.usda.gov/>.

² The nature of innovation may vary, but innovations considered herein share certain characteristics: they are "new ideas, methods, products, services, or solutions that have a significant positive impact and value" and involve "transforming creative concepts into tangible outcomes that improve efficiency, and effectiveness, or address unmet needs." See Nick Jain, "What is Innovation? Definition, Types, Examples and Process". *IdeaScale*. 15 July, 2023. Accessed at <https://www.ideascale.com>.

may be best advanced through demonstration projects, and/or through direct collaborations with the construction and real estate development industries.

Beyond construction, an array of other innovative wood products show promise to similarly stimulate the market for lumber and thereby strengthen the future of working forest management. The range of products include novel wood-based packaging solutions; carbon fibers; thermally modified wood; energy applications for woody biomass; biochar; wood-based bioplastics; and more. These innovations—like those in construction—are expected to require investments at various stages of value chains, as well as pilot projects and new partnerships aimed at stimulating adoption.

Request for Proposals: Seeking Projects that Enhance and Encourage Innovative Wood Products and Value Chains

The Richard King Mellon Foundation seeks proposals that support innovation in wood products; strengthen associated value chains; and/or encourage deployment of these materials. The cumulative intent is to accelerate the use of novel wood products across the built environment and among consumers, with attendant benefits to conservation and economic development.

RFP responses may address product development; certification and commercialization; market and value chain strengthening; deployment of new technologies in demonstration projects; and other scalable projects with the potential to secure and enhance the benefits of innovation in innovative wood products.

The Foundation has a particular interest in projects that demonstrate a clear nexus with rural economic development in areas with conserved natural resources and landscapes.

Proposal Requirements

- (1) Applications must outline an approach to **launch, enhance, or expand the application of one or more innovative wood-based product(s)**.
- (2) The Foundation welcomes proposals from non-profit organizations; public sector entities; and scalable for-profit companies. The Foundation provides both grants and Program-Related Investments (PRIs) to nonprofit organizations, and provides grants to public sector entities. The Foundation primarily uses PRIs structured as convertible notes to provide funding to scalable for-profit companies.
- (3) Priority will be given to proposals that address both the conservation and economic-development outcomes of the project.



- (4) Applicants shall be based in the United States, and project implementation shall occur in the United States.
- (5) Submitted proposals must clearly describe:
- **The problem statement:** the challenge related to innovation in wood products the proposal seeks to address.
 - Specific **activities** that would be undertaken.
 - Feasible, measurable **outputs**, which describe what each activity aims to accomplish. For example, if one activity is to construct modular housing units using mass timber components, example outputs would include the number of units constructed, the volume of timber used in construction, and the total cost of development per unit.
 - Feasible, measurable **outcomes**, including target metrics that describe the degree of *change* in behaviors, knowledge, or skills that are expected to result from the proposed activities. Example outcomes for an upskilling project aimed at introducing builders to a wood-based material could be, for example, the size of the construction market newly made viable for that material.
 - How the proposed outcomes **align** with the Foundation's Conservation funding program and any economic development outcomes associated with the project.
 - **A monitoring, evaluation, and learning plan** to track and document outputs and outcomes.
 - **A sustainability plan**, describing how Foundation funds would seed initiatives with the potential to be sustained through earned revenue or other long-term funding mechanisms. Applications should describe how the outcome of the proposed project will result in a financially viable market, enterprise, or program.

Types of Support

Applications should fit under one of the following types of support:

Planning and Innovation. A planning and innovation grant may provide an opportunity for partners to formally come together to assess an opportunity, develop a plan for addressing those needs, strategize on a way forward, and newly deploy a product or solution. Planning and Innovation support may include:

Product Development. For projects involving promising innovations in wood products that require further research and development. Products should have a demonstrable commercialization pathway, and the potential to generate conservation and economic-development benefits.

Certification and Commercialization. For projects involving fully developed innovative wood products that require testing, certification, inclusion in industry



standards, or similar prerequisites prior to use in demonstration projects or scalable implementation.

Program or Partnership Development. For projects that contemplate launching a new partnership or program, and which seek funds for the purpose of planning, coordinating, or scoping.

Implementation. Implementation grants are for efforts to deploy innovative forest products that may have already started or are already planned and therefore need further infusion of funds to support more creative or expansive efforts. Implementation support may include:

Demonstration Projects. For projects involving appropriately certified wood-based materials with low adoption rates, intended to improve the visibility of the material; to increase the comfort of designers, builders, and producers with use of the material; to improve consumer comfort with new materials; to demonstrate cost-effectiveness; or similar goals.

Value Chain Strengthening. For projects involving critical supply chain activities associated with one or more innovative wood-based construction material(s), including enhancing source-material production and the sustainability of sourced lumber; capital investments in value-added enterprises; upskilling of the forest products and construction workforces; and other precursors to scalable deployment of the material.

Scalability. Scalability grants are for projects that expand on the demonstrated success of a wood-based construction material, allowing for the penetration of new markets or accelerated adoption of the product.

Scalable Product Deployment. For projects aimed at broad and scalable incorporation of one or more innovative wood products in major construction projects or commercially available product lines.

Marketing and Promotion. For projects and programs that increase the visibility of innovative wood products; accelerate the acceptance or adoption thereof; and coordinate among multiple businesses to advance the interests of the wood-products industry.

Social Impact Investment. Social Impact Investments in the form of Program-Related Investments are for early-stage for-profit companies that are seeking to grow their business focused on the development and deployment of innovative forest products in construction.



Funding Amounts

The Foundation does not have a limit or range for funding amounts per application for this RFP.

Successful grants may be invited to apply for follow-on funding or additional capacity-building funding opportunities at the conclusion of the grant.

Use of Funds

Funded activities must be conducted within 6-18 months.

Grant funds awarded through this RFP may be used for a variety of expenses such as program and service delivery; capital expenditures; administrative expenses; consultant fees; or evaluation.

What the Foundation Will Not Fund

The Foundation will not fund the following items through this RFP:

- Endowments or capital campaigns
- Public-policy advocacy, political causes, or political events
- Existing deficits or retroactive funding
- Event sponsorships

Application Timeline

Funding is expected to be awarded based on the following schedule.

RFP Timeline	
Wednesday, October 1, 2025 Noon (12:00 PM) EST.	Applications Due Apply - Richard King Mellon Foundation (rkmf.org)
Wednesday, December 5, 2025	Funding Status Notification
Friday, December 23, 2025	Funds Issued for Awarded Grants

Inquiries and Question Submission

The Foundation's general eligibility criteria apply to the RFP. Please review our [application FAQ](#).

The Foundation will **not** respond to substantive questions related to this RFP prior to application submittal. For questions following submittal, please email related to this RFP to rkmf@rkmf.org. Use the subject heading: **Innovative Wood Products RFP**.