

Federal Government and Urban Forestry

- DRAFT -

2024

Overview

The federal government plays a critical role in promoting, funding, and regulating urban forestry initiatives. The Urban and Community Forestry (UCF) program, housed in the United States Forest Service (USFS), along with state agencies and organizations, are working to improve over 140 million acres of urban and community forest across the United States. As a part of the Biden Administration's Justice40 Initiative, 40% of program's investments will be through existing and new partnerships working to support disadvantaged communities with low tree canopy and environmental justice issues.

The Federal Government and Urban Forestry

The following is a general overview of how the federal government supports urban forestry initiatives. This guide can provide a brief overview and example for each topic area and how each interacts and aligns with urban forestry initiatives.

Funding

The USFS and UCF program attempts to catalyze tree planting and maintenance across the country through funding. Depending on funding allocations from Congress, the department provides funding for states, localities, and organizations to plant and maintain trees, provide education in communities around the benefits of urban forestry, and other relevant activities.

- [Urban and Community Forestry Cost Share Grants](#) – This set of grants seek to align with the fourth and fifth goal from the 2016-2026 National Ten Year Urban and Community Forestry Action Plan, which focus primarily on increasing the health and resilience of trees and community forests, and support the planting of native species, with a particular emphasis on the quality of the tree rather than simply the quantity. These grants require cost-sharing between the grantee and USFS – and grantees are usually non-profits, universities, or federally recognized tribes. Around \$1 million was available for the February 2024 round of funding.
- [Urban and Community Forestry Inflation Reduction Act Grants](#) – This \$1 billion dollar funding effort, through the 2022 Inflation Reduction, was awarded to 385 grantees including non-profits, local and state governments, tribes and tribal organizations, universities, and others. The funding will support tree-planting, urban forest planning and management, and other activities, primarily in disadvantaged communities.

Technical Assistance

In addition to funding urban and community forestry projects and initiatives, USFS also employs and curates significant resources to help organizations with questions concerning tree planting, maintenance, and other key questions surrounding urban forestry. Providing resources and technical

assistance to localities and organizations can help to develop capacity across the country for this type of work.

- [Vibrant Cities](#) – The Vibrant Cities Lab is a joint effort from the USFS, American Forests, and the National Association of Regional Councils to support a broad range of urban and community forestry efforts. This outstanding tool provides research, case studies, and guides and a variety of different benefits that trees can provide. There is also an [Urban Forestry Toolkit](#), which helps an organization or locality plan, from beginning to end, an urban forestry initiative.
- [Regional Urban & Community Forestry Programs](#) – While there are certainly best practices, strategies, and benefits that can apply across the country, there is no one-size-fits-all solution to both plan and implement urban and community forestry initiatives. For this reason, USFS has included urban and community forestry programming into its 10 regions, which provide more specialized technical assistance to different states and cities.

Policymaking and Regulation

- [National Ten-Year Urban and Community Action Plan](#) - The National Ten-Year Urban and Community Forestry Action plan tries to expand awareness of the benefits urban forestry has across the country and increase investment in these initiatives. It was developed with input from over 1,000 stakeholders from across the nation. The plan can be seen as a guide that provides specific goals, actions, and recommendations for urban and community forestry initiatives. Perhaps most notably, this plan serves as a framework for funding and recommendation priorities for USFS urban forestry grants.
- [NUCFAC – The National Urban and Community Forestry Advisory Council](#): The National Urban and Community Forestry Advisory Council (NUCFAC), according to the USFS, “...is a Congressionally designated advisory council to the Secretary of Agriculture on urban forestry and related issues. The 1990 Farm Bill created NUCFAC to bring together the wide variety of voices raised about a common concern: the present health and future preservation of America's urban forests. NUCFAC was founded to synthesize the full spectrum of views into a consistent vision, as a foundation for practical policy on urban forestry and related natural resources.” NUCFAC is critical to implementing UCF priorities and serves as the real-world input to help determine progress on Action Plan goals and find funding to implement those items. Urban forestry professionals are encouraged to apply to participate when there are vacancies on the Council.

References

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