VERMONT URBAN & COMMUNITY FORESTRY PROGRAM

2024 COMMUNITIES CARING FOR CANOPY
Grant Overview

The Vermont Urban & Community Forestry Program (VT UCF), a partnership between the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks & Recreation and University of Vermont Extension, seeks applicants needing financial assistance to support the development of local urban and community forestry initiatives or programs.

Communities Caring for Canopy grants provide seed funding to help communities and organizations develop and sustain programs towards the advancement of urban and community trees and forests. These grants allow for multiple program components to be merged into one grant application.

This document contains information to support grant applications and project development. Please note that there are three grant categories in 2024: **Communities Caring for Canopy**, *Growing Urban Forests in the Face of Emerald Ash Borer, and Urban & Community Forestry Grants.* This overview document pertains to the first category listed.

There is a common application form for all grant categories; applicants may apply for more than one grant category but must submit a separate application for each. VT UCF has developed a 2024 grant eligibility map to support applicants and project development.

WHO MAY APPLY

Municipalities, public educational institutions, and 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations may apply for a *Communities Caring for Canopy* grant. Projects may occur anywhere in Vermont.

AVAILABLE FUNDS

Grant awards will be **between $5,000 and $20,000**, for a total of $70,000 in 1:1 cost-share grants available in 2024. These funds will be distributed through a competitive grant review and selection process.

Funding for this program is available from the USDA Forest Service under Code of Federal Domestic Assistance 10.664, Cooperative Forestry Assistance, Federal Fiscal Year 2024.

PROJECT ELIGBILITY

Projects must relate to urban and community forestry in public ways and places as defined in 24 V.S.A. § 2501a or at public educational institutions, take place in Vermont, and may consist of one or more of the following program components:

- Tree planting
- Tree nursery establishment

- Tree maintenance
- Removal of trees in public ways and places that pose a risk to public safety
- Tree inventory activities
- Plan development
- Pest and disease preparedness efforts
- Public outreach
- Staff or tree warden training
- Program development

ELIGIBLE PROJECT COMPONENTS GUIDELINES

Below are general guidelines for each of the eligible project components.

TREE PLANTING AND TREE NURSERY ESTABLISHMENT

- The estimated total number of trees that will be planted must be included in the project proposal. All proposals must provide a draft species list and a maintenance plan for all planted trees, including provisions for replacing trees that have not survived.

- All tree planting activities associated with a project must adhere to the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) A300 Standards for Tree, Shrub, and Other Woody Plant Management.

- Funds can be used to purchase and/or plant trees. Planting stock should be at least 1 ½ inches in caliper and no larger than 3 ½ inches. Balled and burlapped or bare root stock is the preferred stocking material; VT UCF cautions that large (>1" DBH) container-grown trees may lead to root binding or girdling. Please refer to the VT UCF factsheet Planning to Purchase a Tree for guidance on selecting high quality trees.

- The Vermont Tree Selection Guide should be used as a reference for site assessment and tree selection.

- VT UCF encourages project coordinators to consider purchasing trees from Vermont-based nurseries. Visit the Vermont Nursery & Landscape Association's website for more information.

- Trees can be planted on public ways and places such as public rights-of-way, parks and greenbelts, and areas around public buildings, including public schools.

- Tree planting on private property can occur when property owners are willing to support community-wide tree programs by providing permission for the applicant to plant and, potentially, maintain trees on private property bordering public ways and places. Recognizing that this is a strategy that may be of interest to municipalities and organizations, private property plantings are eligible for this grant program, provided the guidelines below are met:

- o A sample written agreement must be included with the application. Examples of existing agreements can be found on the VT UCF website. This agreement must address:
    - Responsibilities of both the property owner and the applicant,
    - Tree care and survival, and
    - Duration for which the agreement will exist.
  - o The written agreement sample or template must be approved by both VT UCF staff and the program's Regional UCF Program Coordinator with the USDA Forest Service prior to the project's initiation.
  - o Upon approval, a written agreement must be signed by both a municipal or organizational representative and the property owner for each property on which a tree or multiple trees will be planted; copies of these agreements must be submitted with the final project report.

- Funds can also be used to support the growing environment of a tree or group of trees, including those grown in a municipal or community tree nursery, for long-term success. This includes activities to increase available soil volume, irrigate trees, and for tree protection.

- Applications that allow for trees to act as green infrastructure to manage stormwater runoff are encouraged.

- Strategically planting trees to maximize their long-term benefits is encouraged. For example, planting trees to conserve energy, improve or expand recreational space, enhance community resilience, or increase business patronage will receive special consideration. Refer to the USDA Forest Service's Vibrant Cities Lab for resources and ideas.

- Strategically planting trees to increase equitable distribution of tree canopy cover across a community is encouraged. Learn more about Tree Equity here.

TREE MAINTENANCE

- Funds can be used for the maintenance of trees in public ways and places or at public educational institutions. If hiring a professional arborist, refer to the International Society of Arboriculture's Certified Arborist database.

- All tree maintenance activities associated with a project must adhere to the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) A300 Standards for Tree, Shrub, and Other Woody Plant Management.

- Tree maintenance should focus on a prescriptive approach to long-term tree health and structural improvements. This could include structural pruning/training of young trees, crown cleaning and corrective pruning of mature trees, deep root feeding, cabling/bracing, and soil compaction mitigation.

- Funds can be used for equipment to maintain and care for trees, including hand and pole pruners, pruning saws, mulch, watering bags or tanks, and staking materials.

- Project funds may **not** be used to support insecticide treatment of trees, a long-term commitment not adequately supported by a grant. However, the costs associated with protection of public trees through insecticide treatment may be used as applicant match.

REMOVAL OF TREES IN PUBLIC WAYS AND PLACES THAT POSE A RISK TO PUBLIC SAFETY

Grant funds may support removal of trees in public ways and places as defined in 24 V.S.A. § 2501a or at public educational institutions if it has been determined that the tree(s) in question pose a considerable risk to public safety, following these guidelines:

- A recommendation to remove the tree(s) in question must be in written from a professional arborist that has performed at least one site visit to the tree(s). The recommendation for removal must include the contact information of the arborist that assessed the condition of the tree and must be included as an attachment to the grant application.

- If the tree(s) proposed for removal are ash (genus *Fraxinus*), no written recommendation from a professional arborist is required. All ash tree removals and disposal of wood waste should adhere to the State of Vermont's Slow the Spread recommendations. Applicants are encouraged to submit supporting documentation regarding emerald ash borer planning including ash inventory or survey results and adopted strategies for mitigating the impact of emerald ash borer.

- Removal of any trees on private land is not eligible for funding.

- If the project includes tree removal, VT UCF encourages applicants to include tree planting in the project to offset the loss of canopy cover. Replacement tree plantings may occur at the site of tree removal or at another location and must follow the guidelines in the tree planting section above.

- The estimated number and approximate size class distribution of trees to be removed must be included in the project proposal. Recommended size classes are <6" diameter at breast height (DBH), 6-12" DBH, 12"-24" DBH, and >24" DBH.

TREE INVENTORY ACTIVITIES

Funds can be used to support a public or shade tree inventory, roadside ash inventory, roadside vegetation assessment, urban tree canopy assessment, purchase of data collection equipment (iPad, GPS unit), and/or purchase of tree inventory and management software systems.

PLAN DEVELOPMENT

Funds can be used to develop plans to guide future community tree management. Examples include a shade tree preservation plan, urban forest management plan, tree planting plan, roadside vegetation

management plan, forest conservation plan, town forest recreation plan, or any other planning efforts that support or incorporate a community-wide tree program.

PEST AND DISEASE PREPAREDNESS EFFORTS

Funds can be used towards preparing for the impacts of the emerald ash borer or other pests of concern, including oak wilt, beech leaf disease, spotted lanternfly hemlock woolly adelgid, and Asian longhorned beetle. Examples of supported activities include development of a pest preparedness or management plan, development of a public awareness campaign, and health assessments of ash trees or other species of concern. Visit vtinvasives.org for more information.

PUBLIC OUTREACH, STAFF OR TREE WARDEN TRAINING, OR PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

Funds can support forming a tree board or committee, developing a tree ordinance or policy, training, or professional development for town staff, tree warden, or volunteers. Funds can also be used to improve awareness and education of the importance of community trees and their management.

APPLICATION AND REVIEW PROCESS

Applications will be reviewed by a grant review and selection committee for completeness, eligibility, and applicability to the grant category focus areas. Sample applications are available on our Grant FAQ page as guidance.

STATEMENT OF NEED

Provide a succinct statement of the need for funding, identifying the opportunities and desired outcomes of the proposed project. How will the project help to further your community or organizational goals? Include any information that supports a comprehensive understanding of the applicant's situation, e.g., tree inventory or survey results, planning efforts, and who has been or will be involved in making decisions about urban and community forestry management. Limit 4,000 characters.

WHAT DO YOU PLAN ON DOING and HOW WILL YOU DO IT?

What do you plan on doing and how will you do it? In list format, describe what action steps you are planning to implement. Include with each bulleted or hyphenated item a description of what will be done, the measurable results, and a timeline.   Please be as specific as possible; this list should outline every distinct deliverable of your project. *Communities Caring for Canopy* projects must be completed by **October 31st, 2025.** Limit 4,000 characters.

WHO WILL CARRY OUT THE PLAN?

In concert with the action items entered above, identify who will be involved in the project and their role including services provided, financial contributions, and product donations. Consider the various municipal staff, boards and commissions, tree warden, community members, professionals, and organizations that can be called upon as partners to support your efforts. If municipal or organizational

staff are planting, maintaining, or removing trees, provide details about their qualifications and experience. Limit 4,000 characters.

PRE-GRANT AND POST-GRANT SITE VISIT

Funded projects may require a pre-grant or post-grant site visit with a VT UCF staff member to support grant success. VT UCF will notify each award recipient if a pre-grant or post-grant review is required in the grant award announcement.

ELIGIBLE COSTS

Eligible costs are those necessary for completing the project. Costs must be documented, reasonable, and consistent within the scope of the project, in accordance with Uniform Guidance 2 CFR Part 200 Subpart E, Cost Principles. Note that projects must adhere to any procurement policies in place at the applicant's organization, municipality, or educational institution.

Examples of project costs include:

- Cost of services, supplies, equipment, or facilities used on the project.
- Costs of trees to be planted, site preparation, tree protection, and associated supplies necessary for successful tree planting and establishment.
- Costs associated with purchase of equipment to increase the municipality's capacity to plant trees and successfully manage a community-wide tree program. Equipment is defined as tangible personal property with a per unit-cost of $5,000 or more and a useful life of one year or more. Purchase, use, and management of equipment under this grant is subject to requirements in Uniform Guidance, 2 CFR Part 200.
- Costs of public outreach and engagement.
- Salaries and fringe benefits of people working directly on the project.
- Value of labor, services, supplies, equipment, or facilities donated to the project by third parties.

COST SHARE REQUIREMENTS

Funds will be awarded on a 1:1 cost-share basis; in other words, the match provided must be at least equal to requested funds. The cost-share match may be in the form of cash, services, or in-kind contributions. Match may take the form of additional tree plantings or risk tree removals. In-kind contributions can include the cash value for volunteer assistance in planning and all grantee personnel/staff labor, as well as the donation of professional services or materials. *Example: The value of volunteer time assisting in a street tree inventory or tree planting are considered an in-kind contribution and an eligible match.*

Costs contributed as match must be eligible as described in the preceding section, Eligible Costs. Use of federal funds from other programs as match will be approved on a case-by-case basis and is contingent upon agreement from the organization or agency from where those funds originate. Volunteer time contributed as match must be documented to include names and affiliations, dates, hours of work

performed, and description of activities. VT UCF will provide a form on which to report matching funds upon request.

VALUE OF IN-KIND CONTRIBUTIONS

- Volunteers: Please see our Grant FAQ webpage for recommended rates
- Donated professional services: use customary rates for services provided
- Donations of materials: use fair market value
- Personnel/staff: use hourly wage rates (may also include fringe benefits)
- Equipment: use established rates per hour, per mile, etc.

TIMELINE

Applications must be submitted on or before midnight on Friday, January 5th, 2024. Grantees will be notified of funding approval by February 1st, 2024. Awarded funds in the form of signed grant agreements are anticipated to be available by the end of March 2024. Projects must be completed, and a final financial report and invoice submitted by October 31st, 2025.

PAYMENT PROCESS

All funds awarded through the *Communities Caring for Canopy* grant program will be available for payment in accordance with the following schedule:

- one-third payable after the signing of the grant agreement as accompanied by an invoice,
- one-third at a mid-project point as accompanied by a progress report and invoice, and
- the balance upon completion of the project with verification of payment of all expenses and with submission of a final report and invoice.

Refer to our Grant FAQ webpage for more information.

Please note that grantees will be required to pay for contracted services before final reimbursement from the State. The Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation reserves the right to make partial payment upon non-compliance of conditions in the grant agreement. Allow 4–6 weeks from the time of the payment request to receipt of the check from the State Treasurer's Office.

HOW TO SUBMIT YOUR APPLICATION

New this year, applications will be accepted via the online 2024 Common Application for Urban & Community Forestry Program Grants. The online form application will accept applications until 11:59pm on Friday, January 5th, 2024. Note that the online form application cannot be saved or restarted; we suggest that applicants download and use the Grant Application Worksheet on the grant webpage to develop, edit, and save your work until you are ready to fill the form out entirely and submit.

Applications will not be considered complete until the application form is submitted and the four required additional documents that are outlined on the Grant Application Worksheet and within the Common Application are submitted via email to elise.schadler@vermont.gov.

HELP

For more information or assistance, contact the VT UCF staff listed below.

Grant Application & Submission Questions: Elise Schadler, (802) 522-6015, elise.schadler@vermont.gov

Project Development Questions: Joanne Garton, (802) 249-4217, joanne.garton@vermont.gov

VT UCF staff will host monthly 2024 Grants Office Hours as a chance for applicants to ask specific questions about the grant categories, application development, and submission process. These Office Hours will be held virtually using Microsoft Teams and pre-registration is not required. Meeting dates, times, and links are as follows:

- Tuesday, September 19th, 12-1pm, meeting link
- Friday, October 20th, 12-1pm, meeting link
- Thursday, November 16th, 12-1pm, meeting link
- Monday, December 18th, 12-1pm, meeting link

The *Communities Caring for Canopy* grant program is one of the many tools the Vermont Urban & Community Forestry Program offers to support local tree care and stewardship. Visit our website to learn more: VTCOMMUNITYFORESTRY.ORG