# 2024 Community Tree Planting Grant Guide

The Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission (CCRPC) seeks applicants for tree planting grants in high priority areas across Vermont to increase urban tree canopy and improve water quality and public health by controlling stormwater.

CCRPC is administering this block grant program on behalf of the Vermont Urban & Community Forestry Program (VT UCF), a partnership between the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks & Recreation and University of Vermont Extension. . In alignment with the Vermont Climate Action Plan, tree planting under this grant will also advance climate change adaptation through the restoration of tree canopy, which will improve air and stormwater quality while reducing public health impacts from heat islands in high priority urban areas in Vermont. Funding is provided by Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds as part of the federal American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA).

This document contains information to guide project development and grant applications. Grants will be awarded through a competitive selection process over two rounds; all grant funds must be spent by July 2026.

## WHO MAY APPLY

This is a **STATEWIDE** grant program – while CCRPC is administering the grant on behalf of VT UCF, eligibility includes any of the following entities within the state of Vermont:

- Municipalities as defined in 1 V.S.A. § 126 (Cities, Towns, Fire Districts, Incorporated Villages, and Union Municipal Districts)
- Regional Planning Commissions (RPCs)* in coordination with member municipalities
- Registered Non-Profit Entities (including Public Educational Institutions)

Eligible entities may apply for either round of funding; entities that have received funding under the first round may apply for additional funding in the second round. Applications from eligible entities that have not yet received VT UCF funding will be prioritized in both rounds.

**Regional Planning Commission as Agent:** RPCs may serve as grant administrator and fiscal agent for one or more of their member municipalities. This means that the municipality would design & oversee the project, while the RPC would prepare the grant application, hold the grant contract, receive and spend grant funds, manage contractor procurement, and submit invoices & reports. RPCs are allowed a 10% administrative budget of projects for which they act as agent. RPCs cannot act directly as agent for schools and nonprofits, but these entities may either apply for funding directly or partner with a municipality to apply with the RPC as agent.

## AWARD AMOUNT AND GRANT ADMINISTRATION

A total of $630,000 is available for projects under this program, with a total of $315,000 available in 2024 and a second round of $315,000 available in 2025.

Individual grant awards will be between $5,000 and $75,000. There is no cost-share requirement for grant awards.

Municipalities applying for projects with a budget of less than $25,000 in grant funds are strongly encouraged to authorize their Regional Planning Commission (RPC) to act as the fiscal agent and grant administrator on behalf of the municipality (see above for details). This will not only allow municipalities with small awards to focus their capacity on implementation, it will also reduce administrative costs by enabling RPCs to "bundle" contracting, invoicing, and reporting tasks for multiple small projects of their member municipalities.

To find your Regional Planning Commission and contact information, visit the Vermont Association of Planning & Development Agencies (VAPDA) website.

## ELIGIBLE ACTIVITIES AND COSTS

Eligible costs are those necessary for completing the project. Costs must be documented, reasonable, and consistent within the scope of the project. Note that projects must adhere to any procurement policies in place at the applicant's organization, municipality, or institution.

Projects must include **tree planting activities** in Vermont at the following locations:
- Within public ways and places as defined in 24 V.S.A. § 2501a:
  - "Public place" means municipal property, including a municipal park, a recreation area, or a municipal building. "Public place" shall not include any municipal forestland or property that is subject to any ownership interest held by the Agency of Transportation.
  - "Public way" means a right-of-way held by a municipality, including a town highway.
- Within State of Vermont highway rights-of-way provided a section 1111 permit is in place or in process (see page 5)
- At public educational institutions
- On properties owned by registered non-profit entities
- On private property provided an approved agreement is in place between an eligible subgrantee and the private property owner

Eligible project costs may include the following:
- Costs of trees to be planted, including delivery.
- Staff salaries and contracted services associated directly with tree planting activities.
  - Administrative costs (contract management, invoicing, reporting, etc.) must be no more than 10% of the total budget.

- Preparation of tree planting areas or supporting the growing environment of a tree or group of trees, including those grown in a municipal or community tree nursery; this includes soil, approved soil amendments, tree protection, irrigation, and removal of impervious surface.
- Supplies and materials to ensure successful establishment of planted trees, including watering bags or tanks, mulch, staking materials, and tree protection.
- Cost of associated services, supplies, or facilities used for the project.
- Costs of public outreach and engagement, up to 5% of project budget. An outreach plan must be detailed in the application (either in the narrative or the budget table explanation) with estimates on costs for activities including but not limited to:
  - Staff time spent on outreach activities
  - Printing costs for marketing, outreach, and survey materials
  - Costs associated with events like public meetings, focus groups, facilitated neighborhood walks, or school outreach
  - Costs associated with program accessibility elements like translation services, food, and childcare
  - Stipends for program participants time to lower barriers to participation

## TIMELINE

There will be two rounds of applications for the Community Tree Planting Grant. Both rounds are open to any eligible applicants, including those that have received funding in the prior round. Applications from entities that have not received prior VT UCF funding will be prioritized.

Given the accelerated timeline, it is expected that Round 1 applicants will not require significant assistance in developing their applications. In contrast, Round 2 applicants are encouraged to contact program staff early to request assistance in preparing their proposal.

### ROUND 1 TIMELINE

- April 2, 2024: Applications Open
- April 19, 2024: Deadline to submit questions for Q&A
- May 1, 2024: Suggested deadline to coordinate with RPCs if serving as agent
- May 17, 2024: Applications Due
- June 2024: Grant Awards Announced
- July 2024: Award Contracts Finalized
- December 2025: Grant Closeout (may be extended upon request)

### ROUND 2 TIMELINE

- November 1, 2024: Applications Open
- November 22, 2024: Deadline to submit questions for Q&A
- December 31, 2024: Suggested deadline to coordinate with RPCs if serving as agent
- January 17, 2025: Applications Due
- February 2025: Grant Awards Announced
- March 2025: Award Contracts Finalized
- July 2026: Grant Closeout (no extensions available for this grant round)

## 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 using the Community Tree Planting Grants Scoring Guide. These equally-weighted categories are: Environmental Justice Impact, Likelihood of Success, Co-Benefits Provided, Alignment with Planning Goals, & Project Metrics.

## REQUIRED SITE VISIT

At least one site visit with a VT UCF and/or CCRPC staff member will be required over the course of the project period to support grant success.  Site visits will be scheduled once grant awards have been announced. A site visit will also be available by request during the project development and application process in order to refine the project design. CCRPC and VT UCF will contact awardees to schedule a site visit.

## PROJECT DEVELOPMENT GUIDANCE

Applicants should consider the Application Scoring Rubric and the following when designing their projects and drafting the narrative sections of the application form. **For technical assistance developing a planting plan or assessing a site or species list, contact the UCF's Urban Forester Adam McCullough (see the Help section at the end of this guide).**

### SITE SELECTION

- **Tree planting must be a component of proposed projects.** The estimated total number of trees that will be planted **must** be included in the project proposal.
- This grant will prioritize trees planted in the following locations:
    - Urban areas with low (40% or less) canopy cover. American Forests' Tree Equity Map includes estimates of canopy cover by census tract.
    - Planting sites located within state-designated planning areas.
    - Census tracts with 5 or more flags on the Vermont Department of Health Social Vulnerability Index (overview map)
    - Municipalities ranking high on the Vermont Community Index.
- Planting sites should be selected based on the following considerations (see the VT UCF Right Tree, Right Place Guide for details):
    - What purpose will the tree(s) serve on this site?
    - What will the site conditions be above and below ground? Does the design provide enough soil volume for the tree(s)?
    - What type of maintenance will be needed for the tree(s), and how can maintenance be minimized through avoiding conflicts with human activities (traffic, pedestrians, sight lines for child supervision or drivers, lawn care etc.)?
    - What tree species are suitable for this site? Multiple options should be considered in case the top choice is not available.
    - What co-benefits can be achieved at this site? (see sample co-benefits below)

- See the list of locations where trees can be planted under "Eligible Activities and Costs."
  - Tree planting within State of Vermont Right-of-Way will require a no-cost Section 1111 permit from the Vermont Agency of Transportation. This permit is NOT required to be submitted with the grant application, but must be approved prior to planting. More information on this process is available here.
- 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. Therefore, private plantings are eligible provided the guidelines below are met:
  - The applicant must establish a written agreement with the property owner that addresses:
    - Responsibilities of both the property owner and the applicant,
    - Tree care and survival, and
    - Duration for which the agreement will exist.
  - Signed agreements with private property owners do NOT need to be included with the application. However, a template written agreement must be approved by VT UCF staff prior to the project's initiation. Examples of existing agreements can be found on the VT UCF website.
  - 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 before the tree(s) are 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.

## PLANTING PLAN

- All proposals must provide one or more planting map(s) showing the locations where trees are intended to be planted at the time of project development.
  - At minimum, these maps must include:
    - Planting sites labeled numerically to correspond to the Tree Table
    - Street names or other landmarks
    - Right-of-Way and property lines, with ownership if known
    - Satellite imagery view / basemap
    - Map scale (e.g., 1 inch = 100 feet)
  - More competitive applications may also include information about:
    - Planting site volume and soil type
    - Distance to any nearby structures or streets and distance between trees
    - Easements (if applicable)
    - Overhead and underground utilities (if applicable)

- All proposals **must** provide a Tree Table – a list of planting sites that includes the following information:
    - <u>Planting Site #:</u> Numbers in this column must match your planting map(s).
    - <u>Street Address or GPS Coordinates:</u> Street addresses can use the closest structure or landmark (it's OK if multiple trees have the same address). GPS coordinates are preferred in decimal format (e.g., 44.26309, -72.57985).
    - <u>Species:</u> Use scientific names and cultivars. Multiple species may be listed if undecided, or as alternatives if the top choice is unavailable.
    - <u>Special Design:</u> Examples include Silva cells, Stockholm solutions, structural soil, bioretention area. Leave blank If planting in an open lawn, without additional site preparation.
    - <u>Size at Time of Planting:</u> Measured as diameter of trunk 6 inches above the ground. Must be a minimum of 1.5 inches.
- Proposals must also include a maintenance plan for all planted trees, including provisions for replacing trees that have not survived.

## <u>PLANTING STANDARDS</u>

- 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.
- Planting stock should be at least $1 \frac{1}{2}$ inches in caliper and no larger than $3 \frac{1}{2}$ 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 <u>Planning to Purchase a Tree</u> for guidance on selecting high quality trees.
    - Smaller planting stock may be used for certain types of planting sites, such as riparian buffer restoration. Please contact program staff for technical assistance if you plan to submit a proposal with unique site conditions or planting circumstances.
    - The <u>Vermont Tree Selection Guide</u> should be used as a reference for site assessment and tree selection. Trees native to the planting area or region should be prioritized over other species; avoid using species with known susceptibility to <u>invasive pests</u>; <u>tree species known to be invasive</u> will not be funded.
- VT UCF encourages project coordinators to consider purchasing trees from Vermont-based nurseries. Visit the <u>Vermont Nursery & Landscape Association's</u> website for more information.

## CO-BENEFITS

Strategically planting trees to maximize their long-term benefits is encouraged. Proposals will receive special consideration if they use tree planting to:

- Manage stormwater
- Enhance community resilience
- Reduce Energy Use
- Improve or expand recreational space
- Provide shade where people need it most, when they need it most (e.g., seating at sports fields or playgrounds, over parking areas at grocery stores, or outdoor gathering spaces that can be unusable in high heat).

- Improve or expand business patronage
- Provide a sense of place
- Reduce traffic speeds
- Enhance pedestrian and/or cyclist experiences
- Ameliorate stress and anxiety
- Provide bird and pollinator habitat
- Provide natural buffers / screens for noise / air pollution on traffic corridors
- Provide food

Refer to the USDA Forest Service's Vibrant Cities Lab for resources and ideas.

## ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE IMPACT

This program is funded by Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds as part of the federal American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA). The Governor's Recovery Plan for ARPA funding prioritizes economic recovery for areas facing demographic, income, and employment challenges through infrastructure investments, including urban tree planting.

In addition, Vermont's Environmental Justice Law (3 V.S.A. Chapter 72) directs state agencies to ensure that their programs advance environmental justice, which means that "all individuals are afforded equitable access to and distribution of environmental benefits; equitable distribution of environmental burdens; and fair and equitable treatment and meaningful participation in decision-making processes" (3 V.S.A. §6002(3)). In service of this goal, this program emphasizes working towards environmental justice for underserved communities, which refers to "populations sharing a particular characteristic, as well as geographic communities, that have been systematically denied a full opportunity to participate in aspects of economic, social, and civic life" (as defined in Presidential Executive Order 14091).

Therefore, projects will receive special consideration if:

- Project planning, implementation, or maintenance is authentically led by an underserved community.
- The planting plan maximizes the co-benefit of each tree to underserved communities by mitigating dust, noise, heat, traffic and using the largest possible tree species for all sites.
- The project creates multiple lasting pathways for future benefits in an underserved community through food security, climate resilience, youth engagement, workforce development, etc.

- Trees will be strategically planted to increase equitable distribution of tree canopy cover across a community. Learn more about Tree Equity here.

Applications from under-resourced entities that have not utilized VT UCF financial or technical assistance in the past also will be prioritized.

## INSURANCE GUIDANCE

Upon notification of award and prior to initiating work, Grant Recipients must provide certificates of insurance to show that the following minimum coverages are in effect. It is the responsibility of the Grant Recipient to maintain current certificates of insurance on file with the CCRPC through the term of the Contract. No warranty is made that the coverages and limits listed herein are adequate to cover and protect the interests of the Grant Recipient for their operations. These are solely minimums that have been established to protect the interests of the CCRPC.

*Workers Compensation*: With respect to all operations performed, the Grant Recipient shall carry workers' compensation insurance in accordance with the laws of the State.

*General Liability and Property Damage*: With respect to all operations performed under the contract, the Grant Recipient shall carry general liability insurance having all major divisions of coverage including, but not limited to:

  a.  Premises - Operations
  b.  Products and Completed Operations
  c.  Personal Injury Liability
  d.  Contractual Liability

The policy shall be on an occurrence form and limits shall not be less than:

  a.  $1,000,000 Per Occurrence
  b.  $1,000,000 General Aggregate
  c.  $1,000,000 Products/Completed Operations Aggregate
  d.  $ 50,000 Fire/ Legal/Liability

*Automotive Liability:* The Grant Recipient shall carry automotive liability insurance covering all motor vehicles, including hired and non-owned coverage, used in connection with the Contract. Limits of coverage shall not be less than: $1,000,000 combined single limit.

## HOW TO SUBMIT YOUR APPLICATION

When your application is ready, please send a single e-mail to dschibler@ccrpcvt.org with all required and supporting documents as separate attachments or links to download, including:

A. **This Completed Application Form**
B. **Application Budget Worksheet** (if attaching separately from application form)
C. **Planting Map(s)**
D. **Tree Table** (if attaching separately from application form)
E. **Certificate of Good Standing (attached, see guide for details)**
   Per Section 13 of Act 154 of 2016, grant applicants must provide a Certificate of Good Standing. "Good standing" means the applicant: (A) is not a named party in any administrative order, consent decree, or judicial order relating to Vermont water quality standards issued by the State or any of its agencies or departments; and (B) is in compliance with all federal and State water quality laws and regulations. Available as fillable PDF: agriculture.vermont.gov/sites/agriculture/files/documents/GoodStandingCERT.pdf
F. **Letter(s) of Support from:**
   - **(Required)** The Municipality (i.e., an authorized municipal official; OR, meeting minutes of the legislative body) authorizing this application, authorizing planting of trees on public property (if applicable), and (if applicable) consenting to use of the Regional Planning Commission as agent. See the grant website for a template letter.
   - **(Optional)** Regional Planning Commission staff affirming willingness to act as agent for the municipal project (if applicable). Find your RPC staff here.
   - **(Optional)** Other partners or stakeholders for the project, as applicable (including authorization to plant trees on non-municipal property).

## HELP

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

**Grant Application & Submission Questions:** Darren Schibler, Senior Planner, Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission, (802) 846-4490 ext. 135, dschibler@ccrpcvt.org

**Project Development Questions and Technical Assistance Requests**: Adam McCullough, Urban Forester, VT UCF, (802) 522-5104, adam.mccullough@vermont.gov

**Regional Planning Commission** contacts are listed at https://www.vapda.org/regions.html

Program staff will host at least one informational Zoom webinar (see details below) to share information about this grant and answer questions about project types, application development, and submission process. Afterward, a recording will be available from the project website, along with a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) document.
   - Thursday, April 11th, 9:30am-11:00am
     o Webinar Link | Dial-In Number: 646-876-9923 | Meeting ID: 853 2859 6053