



2026 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. Applications are due Friday, January 30th, 2026.

WHO MAY APPLY

Municipalities and public educational institutions may apply for a *Communities Caring for Canopy* grant. Projects may occur anywhere in Vermont.

AVAILABLE FUNDS

A total of \$40,000 in 1:1 cost-share grants is available, with individual awards ranging from **\$5,000 to \$10,000**. 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 2025.

PROJECT ELIGIBILITY

Projects must take place in Vermont and relate to urban and community forestry in public ways and places as defined in [24 V.S.A. § 2501a](#) and that include municipal rights-of-way and municipal property, or at public educational institutions. Projects must consist of one or more of the following program components:

- Tree planting
- Tree nursery establishment
- Tree maintenance
- Removal of trees that pose a risk to public safety (replanting required)
- Tree inventory
- Planting and management plan development
- Municipal Tree Policy or Ordinance 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 after the first year.
- All tree planting activities associated with a project must adhere to the [VT UCF's Tree Planting Specifications for Communities Caring for Canopy Grants](#).
- Funds can be used to purchase and/or plant trees. Planting stock should be at least 1 inch in caliper and no larger than 3 ½ inches. Exceptions will be made on a case-by-case basis. Please refer to the VT UCF factsheet '[Planning to Purchase a Tree](#)' for guidance on selecting high quality trees.
- Applicants should consider the qualifications of the individuals that will be planting the trees and the importance of proper planting for successful establishment and survival of the tree(s). **New this grant round**, VT UCF will be requiring a post-planting site visit and will be requiring corrective measures if trees are planted improperly, with particular attention to planting depth. If hiring a professional arborist, refer to the International Society of Arboriculture's [Certified Arborist database](#).
- 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. Refer to the Vermont Nursery & Landscape Association's [member directory](#).
- Trees can be planted within public ways and places as defined in [24 V.S.A. § 2501a](#); these spaces include municipal rights-of-way, parks and greenbelts, and municipal property. Trees can also be planted at public educational institutions.
- Tree planting on private property is eligible 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 municipal rights-of-way, municipal property, or a public educational institution. Recognizing that this is a strategy that may be of interest to municipalities and schools, private property plantings are eligible for this grant program, provided the guidelines below are met:

- A sample written agreement must be included with the application. [Examples of existing agreements](#) can be found on the VT UCF website. This sample agreement must address:
 - Responsibilities of both the property owner and the applicant,
 - Tree care and survival, and
 - Duration for which the agreement will exist.
- 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.
- Upon approval, a written agreement must be signed by both a municipal or school representative and the owner for each property on which a tree or multiple trees will be planted; copies of these signed 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. This includes activities to increase available soil volume, irrigate trees, and for tree protection.
- Applications that allow trees to act as green infrastructure to manage stormwater runoff are encouraged. Refer to resources such the [Vermont Green Streets Guide](#), the [Vermont Stormwater Manual](#), and [this webinar](#) on the Stockholm Solution. Activities supported by Community Caring for Canopy Grants in this area may include:
 - Removal of pavement around existing trees or to prepare new tree pits.
 - Establishment of concave planting beds and rain gardens.
 - Stormwater utilization, such as rain barrel installation to water trees.
 - Installation of larger diameter trees, in appropriately sized spaces.
 - Planting and installing small stormwater practices above the floodplain instead of inside it where possible.
- 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 as defined in [24 V.S.A. § 2501a](#) or at public educational institutions.

- Applicants should consider the qualifications of the individuals that will be performing maintenance on trees and the importance of using best practices in tree care. New this grant round, VT UCF will be requiring a post-maintenance site visit and will be requiring corrective measures if trees maintenance has been done improperly (for example, stubs left at location of pruning). 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. Refer to the International Society of Arboriculture for more information about [pruning](#) and [maintaining trees for health](#).
- 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 pesticide treatment of trees, a long-term commitment not adequately supported by a grant. However, the costs associated with protection of public trees through pesticide treatment may be used as applicant match.

REMOVAL OF TREES 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:

- If the project includes tree removal, replacement tree planting at a 1:1 ration must be included 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 number, estimated diameter class (0-6", 6-12", 12-18", 18-24", or 24" +), and location of standing dead or high-risk trees proposed to be removed through the project must be documented in the application.
- To be considered as eligible for high-risk tree removal, a recommendation regarding the tree(s) in question, in written form, **is required** as an attachment to the application. The recommendation must:
 - be from a professional arborist, preferably one that is a [Tree Risk Assessment Qualified](#) professional,

- be based on at least one site visit to the tree(s),
 - include a recommendation for removal based on an assessment of the condition of the tree(s),
 - include the date, and
 - include the contact information of the arborist.
- 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.

TREE INVENTORY ACTIVITIES

Funds can be used to support a municipal 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 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. Sample applications are available on our [Grant FAQ page](#) as guidance.

STATEMENT OF NEED

Provide a succinct statement of need for funding, identifying the opportunities and desired outcomes of the proposed project. How will the project help to further your community or school 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. Note that projects must be completed by October 29th, 2027. Limit 4,000 characters.

WHO WILL CARRY OUT THE PLAN?

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

OUTREACH & COMMUNICATIONS

How will the project be communicated to the public? In what format will communications about the project be (newsletters, articles, flyers, etc.)? Will the public or any specific stakeholders be asked to provide input about the project; if so, how and at what point in the project's timeline? Limit 4,000 characters.

OPTIONAL AND REQUIRED SITE VISITS

Funded projects may require a pre-grant site visit with a VT UCF staff member to support project success.

Funded projects will require a site visit with VT UCF staff if tree planting or tree maintenance are included as project activities. The project leader will be responsible for scheduling a site visit with VT UCF staff once all the applicable grant activities have been completed, but prior to submitting the final report and invoice. If the project included tree planting, the site visit will serve as a post-planting inspection to ensure that planting specifications were followed; if they were not, corrective actions may be required prior to approval of the final project invoice.

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](#). 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, and facilities used to complete the project.
- Costs of trees to be planted, site preparation, tree protection, and associated supplies or services necessary for successful tree planting and establishment.
- Costs associated with purchase of equipment to increase the municipality or educational institution'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 \$10,000 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 such as personnel time of public works crews, town administrators, or other paid municipal staff. Cost-share match may take the form of the cost of additional tree plantings, risk tree removals, or pesticide treatment of trees. 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 source of cost-share 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

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- Volunteers: Please see our [Grant FAQ webpage](#) for recommended rates
 - Donated professional services: use customary rates for services provided

Release Date: 10/21/25

Application Due Date: 1/30/26

- Donations of materials: use fair market value
- Personnel/staff: use hourly wage rates (may also include fringe benefits)
- Donated equipment: use established rates per hour or per mile.

TIMELINE

Applications must be submitted on or before midnight on Friday, **January 30th, 2026**. Grantees will be notified of funding approval by March 1st, 2026. Awarded funds in the form of signed grant agreements are anticipated to be available by the end of April 2026. Projects must be completed, and a final financial report and invoice submitted by October 29th, 2027.

PAYMENT PROCESS

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

- Actual expenses up to 75% of the total award amount submitted at a mid-project reporting date of December 31st, 2026, after the submission of a progress report, expenditure documentation, and an invoice, and
- The balance (at least 25% of the total award amount) upon completion of the project with submission of a final report, expenditure documentation, and an invoice. If the project includes tree planting or tree maintenance, a site visit with VT UCF staff is required prior to submission of the 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 receive the check from the State Treasurer's Office.

HOW TO SUBMIT YOUR APPLICATION

Applications will be accepted via the online [2026 Communities Caring for Canopy Application Form](#). The online form application will accept applications until **11:59pm on Friday, January 30th, 2026**.

Note that the online form application cannot be saved or restarted; we suggest that applicants download and use the Grant Application Worksheet linked 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 required additional documents that are outlined on the Grant Application Worksheet and within the [2026 Communities Caring for Canopy Application](#) Form are submitted **as separate documents in a single 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 or
- Adam McCullough, (802) 522-5104, adam.mccullough@vermont.gov.

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

- Wednesday, November 12th, 12-1pm, [meeting link](#)
- Tuesday, December 16th, 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

The Vermont Agency of Natural Resources is an equal opportunity provider. To file a discrimination complaint, for questions, free language services, or requests for reasonable accommodations, please contact ANR's Nondiscrimination Coordinator at ANR.CivilRights@vermont.gov or visit ANR's online [Notice of Nondiscrimination](#).