



2027 COMMUNITIES CARING FOR CANOPY

Applicant Guidance

The [Vermont Urban & Community Forestry Program](#) (VT UCF) seeks applicants needing financial assistance to support the development of local tree planting, tree care and maintenance, and urban forest planning.

Communities Caring for Canopy grants provide funding to help communities and organizations develop and sustain programs that advance 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 29th, 2027.

WHO MAY APPLY

Municipalities (cities, towns, villages, etc.) and public educational institutions in Vermont may apply for a *Communities Caring for Canopy* grant.

AVAILABLE FUNDS

A total of \$100,000 in 1:1 cost-share grants are available, with individual awards ranging from **\$5,000 to \$20,000**.

Funds will be distributed through a competitive grant review and selection process.

For this 2027 grant round, up to 40% of available funds (\$40,000) will be reserved for applicants who have not received a grant from the VT UCF program within the past 10 years (since 2017).

Communities Caring for Canopy is a reimbursement program. This means that the applicant must be capable of financing the project (after a grant agreement is fully executed) and pay expenditures, then submit a request to the State for reimbursement using the required documentation. The program will reimburse up to 50% of eligible project costs. Recipients are responsible for providing a minimum of 50% of the total project cost (required match).

Funding for this program is available from the United States Department of Agriculture, Forest Service under Code of Federal Domestic Assistance 10.664, Cooperative Forestry Assistance, Federal Fiscal Year 2026.

2027 TIMELINE

- Applications open: Thursday, October 29th, 2026
- Application deadline: 5pm on Friday, January 29th, 2027

Release Date: 10/29/26

Application Due Date: 1/29/27

- Selection announcement: February 2027
- Finalize grant agreements: March – April 2027
- *Communities Caring for Canopy* projects must be completed no later than: October 27th, 2028

ELIGIBLE PROJECTS

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](#). This includes municipal rights-of-way and municipal property, and at public educational institutions. Projects must consist of one or more of the following program components:

- Tree planting
- Tree pruning, care, and other maintenance
- Tree protection and preservation
- Removal of trees that pose a risk to public safety (replanting required)
- Tree inventory
- Development of a tree planting or management plan
- Development of a municipal tree policy, ordinance, or shade tree preservation plan
- Pest and disease preparedness and mitigation efforts
- Staff or tree warden training
- Outreach and program development

Communities Caring for Canopy projects should be “shovel-ready”. Make sure that you have a clear plan in place prior to applying, and that your timeline and activities are realistic.

ELIGIBLE PROJECT COMPONENTS GUIDELINES

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

TREE PLANTING

- “Right tree, Right place, Right way” Is the maxim to follow during project development. Thoughtfully select tree planting sites, pair them with suitable tree species, and ensure planting is done correctly. Many applicants will develop projects without tree professionals on staff. This is why VT UCF provides free technical assistance before the application deadline. Contact Adam McCullough at adam.mccullough@vermont.gov or Joanne Garton at joanne.garton@vermont.gov.
- 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.
- Trees can be planted within State of Vermont highway rights-of-way, provided a section 1111 permit is in place or in process. [Learn more about planting trees in the State ROW](#). The 1111 permit is free, and it is not required at the time of application but must be in place before planting in the State ROW.

- The estimated total number of trees that will be planted **must** be included in the project proposal. All proposals should 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.
- 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.
- VT UCF will require a post-planting site inspection; trees planted improperly will require corrective measures before grant funds are reimbursed. This includes planting depth alterations. To ensure trees are planted correctly please consider the following:
 - Trees must be planted according to [VT UCF's Tree Planting Specifications](#).
 - If paying individuals to do the tree planting, ensure that they are qualified. Arborists certified through the International Society of Arboriculture are recommended. Refer to the New England Chapter of the International Society of Arboriculture's resource [choosing a qualified arborist](#) and the [Find an Arborist database](#).
 - If volunteers will be planting the trees, applicants should ensure these volunteers have been trained; VT UCF has resources to help, including [a video series on planting trees](#) of different nursery stock types.
- The [Vermont Tree Selection Guide](#) is available to 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](#).
- Tree planting on private property is eligible when doing so supports the public good, property owners give written permission, and 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. Following the provided examples is recommended. The sample agreement must address:
 - Responsibilities of both the property owner and the applicant,
 - Tree care and survival, and
 - Duration of the agreement.
 - The written agreement sample must be approved by VT and USDA Forest Service staff prior to the project's initiation.
 - The approved written agreement must be signed by both the grantee and the owner for each property on which any trees will be planted; copies of these signed agreements must be submitted with the final project report.

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- Funds can also be used to support the growing environment of a tree or a group of trees. This includes expenses that increase available soil volume, irrigate trees, and protect trees.
- Using trees to manage stormwater runoff is encouraged. Refer to resources such the [Vermont Green Streets Guide](#), the [Vermont Stormwater Manual](#), and [this webinar](#) on the Stockholm planting method. Activities supported by *Communities 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.
 - Planting and installation of larger diameter trees in appropriately sized spaces.
 - Planting and installation of 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 PRUNING, CARE, PROTECTION, AND PRESERVATION

- 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.
- The number, estimated diameter class (0-6", 6-12", 12-18", 18-24", or 24" +), and location of trees proposed to be maintained through the project must be documented in the application.
- If paying individuals to do the tree planting, ensure that they are qualified. Arborists certified through the International Society of Arboriculture are recommended. Refer to the New England Chapter of the International Society of Arboriculture's resource [choosing a qualified arborist](#) and the [Find an 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 encourage long-term tree health and structural improvements, though tree maintenance with other goals will be considered. 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, nuisance reduction, and aesthetic maintenance.
- Tree pruning can be used to reduce tree risk and is preferred over tree removal when reasonable.
- Funds can be used for materials and supplies to maintain and care for trees, including hand and pole pruners, pruning saws, mulch, watering bags or tanks, and staking materials.
- Funds can be used for tree protection such as salt mitigation barriers, tree guards, bollards, stones, pour-in place rubber tree surrounds, tree grates, curbs that protect trees, permanent fencing or protective railings, mobile fencing supplies and signage for tree protection zones, ground mats for driving over roots.
- Project funds may **not** be used to support pesticide treatment of trees, which is a long-term commitment not adequately supported by a single 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 high-risk trees in public ways and places as defined in [24 V.S.A. § 2501a](#) if it has been determined that the tree(s) in question pose a considerable risk to public safety, following these guidelines:

- The number, estimated diameter class (0-6", 6-12", 12-18", 18-24", or 24" +), and location of high-risk trees proposed to be removed through the project must be documented in the application.
- For tree removal to be considered an eligible project expense, written support for the removal(s) from the municipally appointed tree warden **is required** as an attachment to the application. This written support must:
 - Be based on at least one site visit to the tree(s);
 - Be consistent with [24 V.S.A. § 2504](#), which states: *(a) The tree warden may remove or cause to be removed from the public ways or places any trees that are infested with or infected by a tree pest or that constitute a public hazard. The notice and hearing requirements of section 2509 of this chapter shall not apply to the removal of infested or infected trees;*
 - Include the date;
 - Include contact information for the tree warden; and
 - Be signed by the tree warden.

- Applicants requesting funds for high-risk tree removal are encouraged to submit supporting documentation including any tree inventory records, information about the cause of death or decline of the tree(s), and/or photographs of the trees(s) in question. Strong applications will clearly define and categorize that the risk posed by the tree(s) is unacceptable. For the purposes of the *Communities Caring for Canopy* grant program, unacceptable risk means:
 - The risk must be based on observable tree defects, not just size or future estimated size of the tree(s) in question.
 - The risk must be unacceptable immediately (over the next 3 years), and not just a foreseeable risk in the future.
 - The risk must be to a defined target such as “people in the town green” or “the residence at 12 Baker Street”.
 - Tree removal must be the only reasonable way to reduce the risk to tolerable. Other tree maintenance practices (such as pruning) can often reduce risk substantially.
- If the project includes high-risk tree removal, replacement tree planting at a 1:1 ratio 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. Exceptions will be made on a case-by-case basis.
- Removal of trees on private land is **not** an eligible project expense.

TREE INVENTORY

Funds can be used to support a municipal 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 a tree inventory and management software systems.

TREE MANAGEMENT PLAN, ORDINANCE, OR POLICY DEVELOPMENT

Funds can be used to develop plans and policies to guide future community tree management. Examples include a [shade tree preservation plan](#), [urban forest management plan](#), tree planting plan, shade tree ordinance, roadside vegetation management plan, town forest recreation plan, or any other planning efforts that support or incorporate a community-wide tree program.

PEST AND DISEASE PREPAREDNESS AND MITIGATION 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 training, or professional development for town staff, tree warden, or volunteers. Funds can also be used towards outreach to improve awareness and education of the importance of community trees and their management.

ALLOWABLE PROJECT COSTS

Allowable project 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](#).

Communities Caring for Canopy is a reimbursement program. Grantees will need to secure funds in advance to pay for all project expenses when they occur. Grantees will be able to seek reimbursement on a quarterly basis, and reimbursement can take 4-8 weeks to complete.

Allowable project costs include:

- Cost of services, supplies, 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 associated with public outreach and engagement, including printing and postage.
- Salaries and fringe benefits of people working directly on the project.
 - Administrative costs (contract management, invoices, reporting, etc.) may not exceed 10% of the grant request.

Note that if your project involves hiring a contractor, you **MUST** wait until notification of awards and execution of a grant agreement before beginning the procurement process and signing a contract. Review the FPR [Procurement Guidance for Grantees](#) document to find more information related to contracting as it relates to grants. *Note that this document is specific to the FPR Outdoor Recreation Grants Program but is applicable to Communities Caring for Canopy grants.*

When contracting with any vendor, be sure to solicit written price quotes for all supplies, materials, and workforce/labor. Maintain records from the solicitation of at least three quotes.

Indirect costs:

Indirect costs are eligible for *Communities Caring for Canopy* grants per [2 CFR 200.414](#), but must be included in your project budget and then explicitly named a final grant agreement to claim them. Indirect costs included in your budget can be claimed either **as reimbursement or match (cost-share)**. Applicants may choose **not** to include indirect costs in their budget.

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Indirect costs can only be calculated based on “Modified Total Direct Cost” or MTDC. Per [2 CFR 200.1](#): MTDC “means all direct salaries and wages, applicable fringe benefits, materials and supplies, services, travel, and up to the first \$50,000 of each subaward (regardless of the period of performance of the subawards under the award). MTDC excludes equipment, capital expenditures, charges for patient care, rental costs, tuition remission, scholarships and fellowships, participant support costs, and the portion of each subaward in excess of \$50,000.”

Applicants have two options for budgeting for indirect costs:

- The federal “de minimus” rate. If your organization or municipality does not have a current Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (NICRA), you can include a flat rate of **15%** of your MTDC in your budget. Since the maximum Communities Caring for Canopy grant award amount is \$20,000 (and thus below the \$50,000 threshold), the “de minimus” rate can be applied to all project costs.
- Your established federal NICRA. If you have a previously established NICRA with any federal agency, you **MUST** use that rate. In this case, any applicable restrictions, including those about what types of costs the NICRA applies to, will apply to your Communities Caring for Canopy project. To use a federally established NICRA, you will be required to provide a copy of your NICRA letter with your full application. The NICRA must be active at the time of grant signatures, and if not, the indirect rate may not be included in the grant agreement. Note that if your organization has a current NICRA, you are not permitted to use the “de minimus” rate.

Indirect costs will not need to be itemized any further for reimbursement. This means that applicants do not need to itemize indirect costs or provide itemized receipts for each cost covered by the indirect rate.

Reimbursement for indirect costs should track proportionately to direct project costs. For example, if you’re using the 15% “de minimus” rate, with each reimbursement request, you can request 15% of the MTDC included in that reimbursement request. In other words, you can’t ask for all your indirect costs up front then submit all your itemized direct costs later.

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 (*Communities Caring for Canopy* request + matching funds = total project cost).

The cost-share match may include:

- In-kind or non-monetary donations:
 - Donations of labor, materials, tools, equipment/supplies needed for the project.
 - In-kind contributions can come from state, local/municipal, or private sources (nonprofits, businesses, individuals, etc.).
 - Indirect costs (see above section).
- Cash contributions:
 - State funds, other state grants/funds

- Local cash contributions: municipality's direct monetary contribution (e.g., cash from fund-raising efforts, organizational or municipal funds, local tax revenues, set-aside project funds, force-fund accounts of town/organizational labor forces, local business, private or public contributions etc.) or cash contributions from other local government entities.
- Private cash contributions (e.g. nonprofit organization cash, donations from individuals, cash support from businesses) and other non-governmental grants (e.g., foundation grants, local non-profit organizational grants, awards)

Use of federal funds from other programs as cost-share 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, rate, hours of work performed, and description of activities.

Consistent with [2 CFR 200.306](#), *"Volunteer services furnished by third-party professional and technical personnel, consultants, and other labor may be counted as cost sharing if the service is necessary for the program. Rates for third-party volunteer services must be consistent with those paid for similar work by the recipient or subrecipient. When the required skills are not found in the recipient's or subrecipient's workforce, rates must be consistent with those paid for similar work in the labor market where the recipient or subrecipient competes for the services involved. In either case, fringe benefits that are allowable, allocable, and reasonable may be included in the valuation."*

VALUE OF IN-KIND CONTRIBUTIONS

- Donated professional services: use customary rates for services provided
- Donations of materials: use fair market value
- Personnel/staff: use hourly wage rates
- Donated equipment: use established rates per hour or per mile.
- Donated facilities: use established rental rates per hour or per day.
- Volunteer services: rates for volunteer services must be consistent with those paid for similar work by the applying entity. If your municipality/organization does not have an established value for volunteer time:
 - For skilled labor (e.g. donated time from licensed professionals), you can claim the current fair market rate. Refer to the Vermont Department of Labor's [Economic and Labor Market Information](#) webpage.
 - For unskilled labor, applicants must determine a rate that is reasonable and consistent with those paid for similar work in the labor market.

APPLICATION AND REVIEW PROCESS

Applications will be reviewed by a grant review and selection committee for completeness, feasibility, and eligibility. Refer to the [2027 Communities Caring for Canopy Application Scoring Guide](#) for full application review criteria.

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For this 2027 grant round, up to 40% of available funds (\$40,000) will be reserved for applicants who have not received a grant from the UCF program within the past 10 years (since 2017), consistent with our internal grants database. Note that depending on the pool of applicants it is possible that this threshold will not be met or will be exceeded.

See the [Communities Caring for Canopy Grant webpage](#) for the application worksheet and link to the online form application.

Sample applications are available on our [Grant FAQ page](#) as guidance.

Application components:

1. APPLICANT INFORMATION & PROJECT INFORMATION

Provide information such as project and municipal/organizational contacts, Unique Entity Identifier (UEI) Number, project title, summary, funding request, number of trees proposed to be planted/maintained/removed through the project.

2. 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. historical context, planning efforts, and who has been or will be involved in making decisions about the project. Make specific reference to any supplemental attachments that demonstrate project need and will be included in the application packet. Limit 4,000 characters.

3. 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 bullet or hyphenated action item a description of what will be done, the intended measurable results, and a timeline. Please be as specific as possible; this list should outline every distinct deliverable of your project and, if awarded, will be the basis for the Scope of Work of the grant agreement. Note that projects must be completed by October 27th, 2028. Limit 4,000 characters.

4. 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, the 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. If you intend to hire a contractor as part of your project, note that you must follow the procurement policies of your municipality; please do not identify specific contractors in your application. Limit 4,000 characters.

5. OUTREACH & COMMUNICATIONS

How will the public be engaged in the project? In what format will communications about the project be delivered (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.

6. REQUIRED ATTACHMENTS

In addition to the application components above, applicants will be required to complete and submit the following application attachments **as separate documents** in a single email to elise.schadler@vermont.gov:

- Project Budget Form
- Completed Risk Assessment Questionnaire
- Current Year Certificate of Insurance
- Recommendation for Removal(s) – *Optional*
- NICRA – *Optional*
- Supplemental Materials – *Optional*

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 from VT UCF staff if tree planting is included as a project activity. The project lead 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.

PAYMENT PROCESS

All reimbursement and cost-share project activities must take place:

- in accordance with the terms of the grant agreement,
- after federal and state funding approval, and
- after a grant agreement is fully executed by both the grantee and FPR.

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

- Invoices shall be submitted no more than quarterly based on actual project expenses.
- 10% of the maximum award amount will be withheld from the grantee until the project is completed, a site visit is arranged and conducted (if required), and a final report is received and approved by the State.

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- Match reporting should track proportionately with direct costs at each reimbursement request. At no time can *Communities Caring for Canopy* funds cover more than 50% of the total project costs reported to date. That said, matching costs can be reported as soon as they are incurred, so if all project match is ready with the first reimbursement request, it can all be submitted up front.

Refer to our [Grant FAQ webpage](#) for more information.

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 [2027 Communities Caring for Canopy Grants Application Form](#). The online form application will accept applications until **5:00pm on Friday, January 29th, 2027**.

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 category 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 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:

- Thursday, December 3rd, 2026, 12-1pm, [meeting link](#)
- Tuesday, January 5th, 2027, 9-10am, [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

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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](#).