



Trees Across Mississippi (TAM)

Urban and Community Forestry Grant Program



Administered by the
Mississippi Forestry Commission

INTRODUCTION

The Mississippi Forestry Commission (MFC) in cooperation with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service (USFS) announces the Trees Across Mississippi (TAM) Urban and Community Forestry (U&CF) Grant Program. The program is designed to encourage projects that plant trees and increase the benefits of tree canopy, to create and support long-term and sustained urban and community forestry programs, and to promote the care of trees in communities throughout Mississippi with an emphasis on disadvantaged communities.

OBJECTIVES OF THE URBAN AND COMMUNITY FORESTRY PROGRAM

Legislative Authority

The USDA Forest Service, authorized by the Inflation Reduction Act and the Community Forestry Assistance Act of the 1990 Farm Bill, has allocated funding to the Mississippi Forestry Commission for statewide distribution.

Subtitle D, Sec. 23003 (a). State and Private Forestry Conservation Programs via the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) appropriated \$1,500,000,000 to provide multiyear, programmatic, competitive grants. Of this total allocation \$1,500,000 was allocated to Mississippi to be distributed statewide over 4 years. Urban and Community Forestry (U&CF) is also covered under the Agency's Justice40 Initiative established through Executive Order 13985. To advance the mission of Justice40, proposals should deliver the benefits of IRA investments through established partnerships with local organizations working to support disadvantaged communities experiencing low tree canopy and environmental justice.

The USDA is a partner in the Interagency Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on Promoting Equitable Access to Nature in Nature-Deprived Communities, which seeks to reduce the number of people without access to parks and nature in their communities. The America the Beautiful Initiative supports the prioritization of locally led conservation and park projects in communities that disproportionately lack access to nature and its benefits.

There are three sources of funding for this grant opportunity. One source is Mississippi's Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) funding. These **IRA funds MUST be used exclusively in DISADVANTAGED**

COMMUNITIES identified by the [Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool](#) (CEJST). CEJST is a geospatial mapping tool to identify census tracts that are overburdened by climate change, pollution, or other environmental or socioeconomic factors. These communities identified through CEJST are considered disadvantaged because they are overburdened and underserved.

Other government-sanctioned data sources may be considered for identifying disadvantaged communities, but they must be used in addition to the CEJST tool as supporting information. Also visit <https://treeequityscore.org> to learn more about why trees are critical for every community and how to determine a community's tree equity score, a measure of how well a neighborhood is benefitting from healthy community trees.

The other sources of funding are through non-IRA Community Forestry Assistance funds, specifically the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) and the Urban and Community Assistance Program (U&CF) portion of the Consolidated Payment Grant (CPG). Projects funded by these two sources do not require an exclusive focus on disadvantaged communities. The potential amount that can be awarded is similar and may require a match depending on the source.

Projects or programs of work completed 100% in disadvantaged communities identified by [CEJST](#) will qualify for IRA funding. **IRA-qualified** projects will be eligible for funding up to \$20,000 per year for up to four years based on need and completed milestones. In addition, **IRA-qualified** projects will not be required to provide a match.

Projects which do not focus 100% on disadvantaged communities do not qualify for IRA funding. **Non-IRA** projects may be selected to receive up to \$20,000 in non-IRA Community Forestry Assistance funds which may require an 80/20 match. These projects must be completed within a one-year timeframe.

Federal Program Objectives

The objectives of the Urban and Community Forestry Grant Program are to:

IRA objectives:

- 1) Integrate Urban and Community Forestry into all scales of planning.
- 2) Promote the role of Urban and Community Forestry in human health and wellness.
- 3) Cultivate diversity, equity, and leadership within the Urban Forestry community.
- 4) Strengthen Urban and Community Forest health and biodiversity for long-term resilience.
- 5) Improve Urban and Community Forest management, maintenance, and stewardship.
- 6) Diversify, leverage, and increase funding for Urban and Community Forestry.
- 7) Increase public awareness and environmental education to promote stewardship.
- 8) Prioritize projects focusing work on extreme heat mitigation, urban wood utilization urban food forests, and workforce development.

BIL objectives:

USDA strategic goals:

1. Combat Climate Change to Support America's Working Lands, Natural Resources and Communities.
2. Ensure America's Agricultural System is Equitable, Resilient, and Prosperous.

3. Foster an Equitable and Competitive Marketplace for All Agricultural Producers.
4. Provide All Americans with Safe, Nutritious Food.
5. Expand Opportunities for Economic Development and Improve the Quality of Life in Rural and Tribal Communities.
6. Attract, Inspire, and Retain an Engaged and Motivated Workforce that's Proud to Represent USDA.

US Forest Service National Priorities:

1. Uplifting and empowering our employees through a respectful, safe working environment.
2. Being good neighbors and providing excellent customer service.
3. Promoting shared stewardship by increasing partnerships and volunteerism.
4. Improving the condition of forests and grasslands.
5. Enhancing recreation opportunities, improving access, and sustaining infrastructure.

State Program Goals

In Mississippi's Statewide Forest Resources Strategy 2020, the goals for the Urban and Community Program are described as:

1. Increase awareness of the importance of trees and urban forest management in the urban environment.
2. Work to ensure a healthy urban environment and livable cities in Mississippi through urban forest management.
3. Increase technical expertise in urban and community forestry practices and provide education and training opportunities to urban forest managers, tree care providers, consultants, foresters, and volunteers on urban and community forest management and proper tree care.
4. Develop self-sustaining urban and community forestry programs at the local and state levels.
5. Encourage partnerships in support of urban and community forestry in Mississippi.
6. Seek funding opportunities for implementing urban and community forestry programs in Mississippi.

ELIGIBLE PROJECTS

Eligible projects must meet Federal and State Program Objectives. The Urban and Community Forestry Grant Program is intended to support new initiatives, programs, projects, staff positions, or activities not currently being funded through other sources.

Some examples of eligible categories you could use depending on your approved narrative are described in detail below.

A. URBAN FORESTRY PROGRAM SUPPORT – projects that encourage improved management of community forest resources.

1. **Professional staffing** - Full or part-time employment of an urban forestry professional to assist in community forestry program management. A draft position description and

qualifications must be submitted with the application. Examples: staff or contract positions
Note: All funding for staff positions is expected to be used as seed monies to help establish or build local program capacity. Applicants are strongly encouraged to identify and secure other future sources of funding to maintain staff positions. Grant funding for subsequent years is not guaranteed or may be reduced. Non-IRA funding for this purpose is limited to funding of 10-week intern positions only.

2. **Workforce Development** - Projects that help move towards a more diverse and inclusive workforce in urban forestry and arboriculture. Grant funding may be used to build leadership, conduct outreach activities, increase capacity, or provide training and education to support local community development efforts—examples: Youth Development programs, training programs, internships, apprenticeships, and professional certifications.
3. **Technical Assistance** – projects that develop or collect data needed for efficient management of community forestry resources. Examples: Canopy mapping/assessments, tree inventories, tree management plans, greenspace master plans, and/or urban heat island mapping.
4. **Tree Ordinance/Policy Development or Revision** - Projects that develop, or revise ordinances or policies needed for efficient management of community forestry resources. The ordinance or policy should address the establishment of municipal authority over public trees; assign responsibility to a public department, arborist position, or established tree board or commission; and set maintenance and management standards. The ordinance or policy may also address other issues such as landscape requirements and tree retention or replacement on development sites, riparian buffers, and for the protection of urban forest ecosystems.
5. **Storm Readiness & Resiliency** – projects that develop a cohesive strategy to help communities prepare for storms. Example: Developing a storm readiness plan addressing pre-storm contracts, tree risk assessments along critical routes, and establishing vegetative debris staging areas. A maximum of 30% of the grant award can be used for risk mitigation pruning/removals along critical routes.
6. **Invasive species removal** – projects that address invasive species that adversely impact community forests.

Note: **IRA-qualified** projects are limited to \$20,000 in funding whether the project term is one year or multi-year. **Non-IRA** projects can only be funded once.

B. TREE PLANTING - All projects funded under this category must be to address tree equity, mitigating the effects of extreme heat and climate change, replacing storm-damaged canopy, creating greenspaces, reducing stormwater runoff, and/or increasing the environmental and social benefits of trees. The cost of removing and stump grinding diseased, high-risk, or invasive trees to create planting spaces for new trees is an allowable expense, as is stump grinding. Food forests are eligible if the project's primary focus is establishing canopy to mitigate extreme heat with the secondary benefit being food products. These projects should use mostly native species that require less maintenance such as pecan, mulberry, pawpaw, and persimmon trees. Also eligible are projects that include the cost of removing impervious surfaces to create appropriate planting spaces/soil volume. These impervious surface removal projects must follow technical specifications as outlined by MFC.

All tree planting projects must meet the following criteria:

- 1) Take place on non-federal **public property** such as city/county parks, schools, playgrounds, greenspaces, rights-of-way, business districts, parking lots, and downtown areas.
- 2) Include a tree planting **site plan and map** using aerial photography or GIS. Locations (addresses, zip codes, or GPS coordinates) of all trees must be provided by the end of the project. If applicable, include details of impervious surface removal.
- 3) Include a **3-year maintenance plan**.
- 4) Include a **letter of support from the local government or from the Department of Transportation**, if the applicant is not the property owner.
- 5) Complete and sign the **liability waiver** included in the application.

Note: If your application is approved, your project will be assigned to an MFC Specialist to review and approve the planting and maintenance plan. If applicable, MFC approval will also be required with an impervious surface removal plan.

C. TREE ADVOCACY GROUP DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPORT

1. **Tree Board Creation/Development** - Projects to organize a new tree board/commission or provide training or planning assistance for existing tree boards. A new tree board or commission should be charged by ordinance to act on behalf of the local government in coordination with the community's urban forestry program.
 2. **Non-profit Program Development** – Projects that develop or enhance a non-profit 501(c)3 group's ability to support tree care, tree planting, or tree education efforts in a community or area. Ex: non-profit establishment, tree care training program, staff position to conduct tree planting and education programs, staff position to outreach to disadvantaged neighborhoods or groups to provide tree care education or encourage tree care activities.
- Note: All funding for staff positions is expected to be used as seed monies to help establish or build local program capacity. Applicants are strongly encouraged to identify and secure other future sources of funding to maintain staff positions. Grant funding for subsequent years is not guaranteed or may be reduced.

D. URBAN WOOD UTILIZATION - Projects that increase knowledge, awareness, and visibility of urban wood utilization and recycling. Grant funding may be applied to education and outreach materials, demonstration of specialized equipment and techniques for working on smaller interface woodlots, and assessments of the feasibility of recycling and processing urban waste wood. Funds can also be used to develop a business plan for an emerging urban wood program for public entities or non-profits.

INELIGIBLE PROJECTS

Ineligible projects include, but are not limited to;

- beautification projects
- research
- trail design, construction, or maintenance
- property acquisition and related costs
- construction projects
- equipment purchases

- gift cards

ELIGIBLE RECIPIENTS

Funds may be awarded to units of local governments (city, town, county), non-profit 501(c)3 organizations, or public educational institutions. Other organizations, such as community tree volunteer groups, neighborhood associations, or civic groups that are not 501(c)3 are eligible but must apply in partnership with a non-profit organization or with their local government.

GRANT TIMEFRAME

All applications must be received by 5 PM CST on April 15, 2024. Applicants will be notified of proposal status in mid-May 2024. Approved projects can begin only after a grant agreement and Federal Assurances are signed by the grantee.

All **non-IRA** projects and most **IRA-qualified** projects must be **completed within one (1) year from the date of the finalized grant agreement.**

IRA-qualified projects may be eligible for multi-year funding. Applications for multi-year funding must justify the need for an extended project term and define activities, timelines, and deliverables for each year of the project term. Multi-year projects may be renewed each year based on successful completion of project milestones and must be completed by December 31, 2027.

AVAILABLE FUNDS

Urban and Community Forestry Grant Program funds will be awarded on a competitive basis. Sub-awards will be awarded, and projects completed, as single-year funding unless otherwise specified. Funding is for programs, projects, or activities not otherwise currently funded, and cannot be used to substitute for existing funds. **Funding is not available for entertainment, food and beverages, purchase of equipment, or construction.** The Mississippi Forestry Commission reserves the right to reject any proposals or to approve partial funding for any proposals.

IRA-qualified projects can apply for amounts between \$10,000 and \$20,000. Multi-year projects may apply for a maximum amount of \$20,000 per year for four (4) years. The maximum award for a multi-year **IRA-qualified** project is \$80,000.

Up to 9% of the total ask can be used as administrative but supporting documentation is required. Any products, language, or signage associated with these activities will acknowledge the contribution of the USFS Inflation Reduction Act Urban and Community Forestry funding. **Non-IRA** projects may apply for amounts between \$4,000 and \$20,000.

MATCH REQUIREMENTS

IRA-qualified projects that provide 100% of the benefits to disadvantaged communities qualify for a match waiver as per the IRA guidelines. To justify the match waiver, verification of the project's location on the CEJST tool must be provided along with a written explanation of how the project will impact a disadvantaged community.

Non-IRA projects must provide an 80/20 match with non-federal funds. These non-federal funds cannot be used as a match for any other Federal cost-share project. The match may include in-kind contributions, volunteer assistance, and private and public (non-Federal) monetary contributions. Volunteer hours may be applied to the project at rates appropriate to the skill level of the volunteer and/or the nature of the work being performed. To determine the average dollar value of adult volunteer labor, refer to the Independent Sector at www.independentsector.org/programs/research/volunteer_time.html. For children, use the Federal minimum wage as a standard. **Assistance provided by Federal employees or Mississippi Forestry Commission staff may not be claimed as part of the match.**

All matching funds must be specifically related to the proposed project. The source of the match, cash and in-kind, must be identified and quantified in the application by enclosing letters of intended support. If the match is coming from several sources, you must have a letter from each source including the applicant organization. **All letters of support must include the amount and source of the intended match including, if applicable, a breakdown of the value of personnel time (wage rate, number of hours).** Funds expended before the date of the grant agreement cannot be used as a match. **Funds expended for entertainment, food, beverages, equipment purchase, or construction cannot be used as a match.** Documentation of all matching funds must be provided before reimbursement of the grant award will be issued.

REPORTS

Periodic progress reports and a Final Report are required of the grantee. The schedule and content of final and periodic reports will be set in advance of initiating the project. Final Reports must be submitted within 30 days of project completion.

PAYMENT PROCESS

The funds awarded under the grant are available on a reimbursement basis after project completion and review of the Final Report, or according to a payment schedule agreed to in advance. Grant recipients must submit a *Request for Reimbursement* (included in the award paperwork package and/or available on Submittable) and include records of expenditures along with documentation of all costs. The Mississippi Forestry Commission reserves the right to make partial payments subject to the completion of scheduled milestones and proper documentation of grant expenses and match. The Urban and Community Forestry Grant Program administrator will evaluate the progress of the project to determine eligibility for full payment.

PROJECT EVALUATION

Only applications that meet all requirements will be reviewed. Project proposals will be evaluated on whether the information provided about the project indicates that the project:

- Meets a demonstrated urban forestry need.
- Meets Federal and State Program Objectives.
- Helps strengthen and develop local urban & community forestry capacity.
- Has a realistic time frame for completion.
- Is cost-effective.
- Has documented cash and in-kind matching commitment, if non-IRA.

- Has continued effect after completion.
- Uses innovation or involves research and new technology.
- Has culturally diverse values.
- Enhances volunteer involvement.
- Involves various partnerships.
- Utilizes personnel that have qualifications to complete activities.
- Generates local visibility and incorporates public relations and awareness.
- Can be duplicated and/or used as a model in other Mississippi cities.
- Enhances environmental, social, cultural, historical, psychological, and economic values.
- Shows demonstrated the ability of the applicant to follow through on project completion.
- Accomplishes one or more goals in the community's comprehensive plan.

Note for Non-IRA Funding: Applications from currently certified Tree City U.S.A. or Tree Campus Higher Education locations in Mississippi may be awarded additional points during the review of applications. Click the hyperlink for more information about the [Tree City U.S.A. and Tree Campus](#).

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Potential applicants can contact the Mississippi Forestry Commission or other resources as appropriate to obtain additional assistance or information.

Mississippi Forestry Commission: <https://www.mfc.ms.gov/>

To find your local MFC Community Forester: <https://www.mfc.ms.gov/contact/find-your-forester/>

International Society of Arboriculture: www.isa-arbor.com

Arbor Day Foundation Tree City USA Program: www.ArborDay.org

USDA Forest Service: fs.usda.gov/managing-land/urban-forests/ucf

APPLICATION PROCESS

All applications must be submitted by **5PM CST on April 15, 2024**, through the online grant portal.

Questions?

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