REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS
Urban and Community Forestry Assistance Grants
Sponsored by USDA Forest Service

All applications must be submitted online by **5PM CDT on February 2, 2024**.

INTRODUCTION

The Tennessee Department of Agriculture Division of Forestry (TDF), in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, announces the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) Urban and Community Forestry (U&CF) Grant Assistance Program. This program is designed to fund projects that promote the creation, enhancement, and protection of urban and community forest ecosystems in disadvantaged communities throughout Tennessee.

URBAN AND COMMUNITY FORESTRY PROGRAM OBJECTIVES
Legislative Authority

The U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, authorized by the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), has allocated funding to the Tennessee Division of Forestry - Urban and Community Forestry Program for statewide distribution. Subtitle D, Sec. 23003 (a). State and Private Forestry Conservation Programs via the IRA appropriated $1,500,000,000 to provide multiyear, programmatic, competitive grants. Of this total allocation $4,125,000 was allocated to Tennessee to develop a grant program that distributes funding statewide over a 5-year period.

The Forest Service is a partner on the Interagency Memorandum of Understanding 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. Urban and Community Forestry (U&CF) is also covered under the Justice40 Initiative established through Executive Order 13985. To advance the mission of Justice40, IRA funding proposals should deliver the benefits of IRA investments to communities identified as disadvantaged through established partnerships with local organizations working to support these communities and address environmental justice issues.

Tennessee Urban and Community Forestry IRA funds MUST be used in DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES identified by the Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool (CEJST). CEJST is a geospatial mapping tool that assists with identifying 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 priority will be given to those applications that use the CEJST tool.

Projects or programs of work completed 100% in <u>disadvantaged communities</u> identified by <u>CEJST</u> will qualify for IRA funding. **IRA qualified** projects will be eligible for funding up to $225,000 per year. In addition, **IRA qualified** projects will not be required to provide a match.

<u>Projects which do not focus 100% on disadvantaged communities do not qualify for IRA funding.</u>

Federal Program Objectives

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

Tennessee Urban and Community Forestry Program Goals

- Facilitate the development of strong partnerships between and among other state government departments and programs; nonprofit organizations; city and county governments; civic organizations; affiliated businesses; and educational institutions.
- Increase awareness and practice of full circle management in urban and community forests.
- Increase engagement with prioritized communities under the Justice40 initiative through outreach, education, technical, and financial assistance.
- Increase awareness of the numerous benefits of trees including those related to extreme heat mitigation, stormwater, and public health outcomes.
- Increase community preparedness for natural disasters by providing education and outreach, and assistance related to the Readiness, Response and Recovery program.
- Increase the number of communities participating in Arbor Day Foundation recognition programs.

ELIGIBLE PROJECTS

The TN U&CF IRA Grant Program is intended to support new initiatives, programs, projects, staff positions or activities not currently being funded through other sources. Eligible projects must align with Urban and Community Forestry Program Objectives outlined in the previous section.

<u>Some examples of eligible categories and projects</u>, depending on approval of proposal, are described below. This list is not exhaustive.

A. **URBAN AND COMMUNITY FORESTRY MANAGEMENT**
   Projects that encourage improved management of community forest resources
   through the following:
   1. **Professional staffing or services** – Full, part-time, or as needed employment (staff or contracted) of an urban forestry professional to assist in community forestry program management. A draft position description and qualifications must be submitted with the application
   2. **Technical assistance** – Projects that collect data and/or create plans needed for efficient and effective growth, management and utilization of community forestry resources. Examples: Canopy mapping/assessments, tree inventories, tree management plans, greenspace master plans, storm readiness plan, and/or urban heat island mapping.
   3. **Invasive species removal** – projects that address invasive plant species that adversely impact community forests. Note: Funding for these projects is limited to a total of $150,000 whether project term is one year or multi-year.

B. **TREE PLANTING** - All projects funded under this category must be for the purpose of addressing 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. Projects and expenses allowed under this category include:
   1. Cost of removing and stump grinding diseased, high risk or invasive trees to create planting spaces for new trees is an allowable expense.

   2. Creation of food forests. It is recommended that food forests use mostly native species that require less maintenance such as pecan, mulberry, pawpaw and persimmon.

   Eligible tree planting projects must:
   - 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.
   - Include a list of tree species planned for planting.
   - 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.
   - Include a 3-year maintenance plan.
   - Include a letter of support from the local government or from the Department of Transportation, if applicant is not the property owner.

C. **PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT OR CAPACITY BUILDING**
   1. Tree Board Creation/Development/Training - 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 local government in coordination with the community's urban forestry program.
   2. Non-profit Program or Advocacy Group Development – Projects that develop or enhance a non-profit 501(c)3 or advocacy group's ability to support tree care, tree

planting, or tree education efforts in a community or area.
Ex: nonprofit program establishment; tree care training program (Tree Stewards, etc.); staff position to conduct tree planting and education programs; outreach and education staff position focused on disadvantaged neighborhoods or groups.

D. **URBAN AND COMMUNITY 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; outreach, education and/or training; feasibility assessments of utilizing urban and community wood. Funds can also be used to develop a plan for an emerging urban and community wood program for eligible grant recipients.

E. **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 programs, conduct outreach activities, increase capacity, or provide training and education to support community workforce development efforts. Examples: youth development programs, training programs, internships, apprenticeships, preparation for professional certification acquisition.

Note: All funding for staffing is expected to be used as seed monies to help establish a program or build 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 and, if awarded, may be reduced.

INELIGIBLE PROJECTS

Ineligible projects include:
- Beautification projects
- Research projects
- Construction projects
- Trail design, construction and/or maintenance
- Property acquisition
- Projects that are not 100% focused on prioritized communities for IRA funding.

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 which are not 501(c)3 organizations, are eligible but must apply in partnership with a non-profit organization or their local government. Non-profit organizations will need to upload a copy of their IRS 501(c)3 Letter of Determination.

All applicants must have BOTH a Federal Employer Identification Number (FEIN) and a Unique Entity Identifier (UEI). Information on obtaining a UEI can be found at SAM.gov. This video may also help: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0uv1YNAsINk&t=17s .

GRANT TIMEFRAME

All applications must be submitted online by 5PM CDT on February 2, 2024. Applicants will be notified of proposal status in March 2024. Approved projects can begin only after a grant agreement and Federal Assurances are signed by the grantee.

Most projects are expected to be completed within one (1) year from the date of the finalized grant agreement. However, project proposals may request multi-year funding. Applications for multi-year funding must justify the need for an extended project term and define activities, timeline, and deliverables for each year of the project term. Multi-year projects will be reviewed annually, and renewal will be based on successful completion of project milestones. All projects must be completed by March 31, 2028.

AVAILABLE FUNDS

TN Urban and Community Forestry Grant Program IRA 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. The Tennessee Division of Forestry reserves the right to reject any and all proposals or to approve partial funding for any and all proposals.

IRA qualified projects can apply for amounts between $10,000 and $225,000. Multi-year IRA projects may apply for a maximum amount of $225,000 per year for four (4) years. Maximum award for multi-year IRA qualified projects is $900,000.

INELIGIBLE EXPENSES

Ineligible expenses include:
- Purchase of equipment
- Purchase of food, snacks, or beverages
- Purchase of gift cards
- Purchase of land or land charges
- Purchase of plant material classified as exotic invasive species in TN.
  TN Invasive Plant Council linked here.
- Construction expenses
- Costs that are not incurred during the grant award period
- Costs not approved in the contract or by the TN U&CF Program Coordinator via submission of a grant modification request

MATCH REQUIREMENTS

IRA qualified projects that provide 100% of the benefits to disadvantaged communities may qualify for a match waiver as per the IRA guidelines. To justify the match waiver, two things must be included. (1) Verification of the project's target location's eligibility by taking screenshot(s) of the census tracts via the CEJST. (2) A written explanation of how the project will impact these targeted areas.

REPORTING

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. A payment schedule will be agreed to in advance but will occur no more frequently than monthly. Grant recipients must submit a Request for Reimbursement (included in award paperwork package) and include records of expenditures along with documentation of all costs. The TN Division of Forestry reserves the right to make partial payments subject to completion of scheduled milestones and proper documentation of grant expenses. The Urban and Community Forestry Grant Program administrator will evaluate the progress of the project to determine eligibility for full payment.

Projects must maintain records for at least 3 years following final payment. TDF assumes no liability for any contractors, volunteers, or local government employees working on any projects.

APPLICATION FORMAT
Applications will be completed online. Clear and concise proposals should address an urban and community forestry need and meet one or more of the objectives of the Urban and Community Forestry Assistance Program. Applicants can upload maps, photos, etc. to support their proposal. The information requested in the online application includes:

1. **A brief summary of the proposed project.**

2. **Purpose and Objectives of Project – Make sure to answer the following:**
   - Why is this project important/needed?
   - What will be done to address the identified needs?
   - Where is the project focused? (Communities? Census blocks?)
   - How will this impact the target area(s)? What are the benefits?
   - Why is the applying entity the right fit for successfully completing project? Are they already connected to community where project is proposed? Have they done projects such as this before?

3. **Project Details:**
   - **Activities** – List all the activities involved in the project.
   - **Community Engagement** – Explain the strategies the project plans to use for outreach, education and engagement.
     *ALL communications and signage will attribute projects as made possible by a grant from the USDA Forest Service Urban and Community Forestry Program as part of the Inflation Reduction Act.
   - **Partnerships and Participants** –List project personnel, volunteers, participating organizations, etc. and explain their roles in the project.
   - **Administration** – Specify who will be responsible for project management and record keeping. Who will submit reports – programmatic and financial?
   - **Timetable** – Show project start date, project milestone completion dates, and total project completion dates.
   - **End Product/Result** – What will be the final results of the project? Who will benefit from these results? A table or bulleted list is acceptable.

- **Sustainability --** Are there plans for the project's results to be sustained after the project's end?

4. **Budget Narrative**
   - How will the funds requested be utilized to support the proposed project? (Narrative should align with budget worksheet)
   - A maximum of 20% of the total award can be used towards administrative/indirect expenses.
   - The budget will be compared to the project narrative to determine if proposed expenditures are reasonable and allowable.

   . **Categories that might be used in the budget include:**

   - **Personnel*** – List all staff positions by title. Give annual salary, percentage of time assigned to the project, and total cost for the budget period.
   - **Fringe Benefits** – Identify the percentage used, the basis for its computation, and the types of benefits included.
   - **Travel** – Specify the mileage, per diem, estimated number of trips, and other costs for each type of travel. Please visit www.gsa.gov/perdiem to determine the appropriate federal rates.
   - **Supplies** – All tangible personal property other than "equipment" which is valued at $5.00 or greater. Supplies must not exceed $5,000 per individual item. The budget detail should identify supplies to be purchased.
   - **Contractual*** – Identify each proposed contract and specify its purpose, nature, and estimated cost.
   - **Other** – List each item in sufficient detail for grant administrators to determine the reasonableness of the cost.
   - **Indirect** – only 20% is allowable towards the total award.

*State assumes no liability for any contractors, volunteers, or local government employees working on any projects.

PROJECT EVALUATION

TN Urban and Community Forestry Grant Program IRA funds will be awarded on a competitive basis. **ONLY APPLICATIONS THAT MEET GRANT PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS WILL BE REVIEWED.** Evaluation will be based on whether the proposed project:

- Provides benefits to a disadvantaged community
- Meets a demonstrated urban and community forestry need
- Meets federal and state program objectives
- Has a realistic timeline for completion
- Plans to use qualified personnel
- Involves various partnerships
- Is cost effective

- Shows demonstrated ability of the applicant to follow through on project completion
- Has a plan for long-term benefits/sustainability

GRANT PREPARATION ASSISTANCE

Assistance in developing proposals is available to all potential applicants. Program staff will also provide guidance as to a project's suitability under this program. Applicants are strongly encouraged to discuss potential projects before proposal submittal. Contact information is below to reach out with any questions.

Ashley Kite-Rowland, TN Urban and Community Forestry Program Coordinator

Email: Ashley.Kite-Rowland@tn.gov

ADDITIONAL TOOLS AND RESOURCES

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

- Justice 40 Initiative: https://www.whitehouse.gov/environmentaljustice/justice40/

- Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool: https://screeningtool.geoplatform.gov/en/

- EPA Environmental Justice Screen and Mapping Tool: https://www.epa.gov/ejscreen

- Tree Equity Score: https://www.treeequityscore.org/

- Nation Integrated Heat Health Information System: https://www.heat.gov/

- Vibrant Cities Lab: https://www.vibrantcitieslab.com/

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

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

All applications must be submitted by 5PM CDT on February 2, 2024, through the online grant portal. No paper applications will be accepted.