



---

# Centering Community in Canopy Solutions

2024 Request for Applications

---

---

In accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, this information is available in alternative forms of communication upon request by calling 651-259-5274. TTY users can call the Minnesota Relay Service at 711.

Minnesota DNR and US Department of Agriculture are equal opportunity employers and providers.

## Grant Overview

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) welcomes applications from community-based non-profit organizations, or their named partners, to increase canopy equity in environmental justice neighborhoods by involving community members in the design, administration, implementation, or evaluation of urban and community forestry projects on public and private lands, homeowner associations, or tribal native corporations (including trust lands). This grant opportunity has been funded through an Inflation Reduction (IRA) award from the U.S. Forest Service.

## Eligible Activities

- Community engagement
- Environmental education
- Tree planting
- Removal of hazardous trees by licensed professionals with replacement
- Tree pruning and maintenance activities
- Chemical treatment application by licensed professionals
- Young tree establishment (for example, watering)
- Stewardship management plans

All efforts done by grantees must serve environmental justice (EJ) communities. A map with all the communities that are eligible for this grant is available [here](#) for public viewing. Further questions on eligibility can be directed to [ucf.dnr@state.mn.us](mailto:ucf.dnr@state.mn.us).

## Eligible Applicants

Place-based 501c non-profit organizations are eligible to apply, including neighborhood associations, community-based groups, and volunteer organizations.

Governmental units, academic institutions, or non-profit organizations may also apply in partnership with EJ communities. Letters of commitment from community-based organizations involved in program delivery are required. This type of partnership shall be allowed where community-based groups lack eligible classification for application, or where smaller organizations seek support from an external entity with capacity to conduct grant administration activities. Applicants should describe how the proposed project activities benefit and serve EJ communities.

## Priority Projects

Priority will be given to projects that:

- Involve, engage, employ EJ community members.
- Increase awareness of the value of urban forests among EJ community members.
- Increase canopy equity.

Ensuring fairness, precision, equity, and consistency in competitive grant awards is a policy of the State of Minnesota. This includes implementing diversity and inclusion in grant making. [The Policy on Rating Criteria for](#)

[Competitive Grant Review](#) establishes the expectation that grant programs intentionally identify how the grant serves diverse populations, especially populations experiencing inequities or disparities, or both.

## Funding

The DNR has \$1,000,000 available in U.S. Department of Agriculture - Forest Service Inflation Reduction Act dollars to fund programs that:

- Increase equitable access to urban tree canopy and associated human health, environmental and economic benefits in EJ communities.
- Broaden community engagement in local urban forest planning.
- Improve community and urban forest resilience to climate change, pests and storm events through best management and maintenance practices.
- Provide paid training experiences for community forestry crews to establish and maintain urban forests into the future.
- Support youth employment programs in workforce development and economic opportunities
- Develop paid on-the-job training opportunities, including pre-apprenticeships and apprenticeships, to expand workforce development pathways for green careers in urban and community forestry.
- Work across jurisdictional boundaries where appropriate.

There is no minimum dollar amount applicants can request. The maximum amount that will be funded is \$100,000 per grant. Funding will be allocated through a competitive grant process with review by a committee representing content and community specialists with regional knowledge. DNR expects to contact selected grantees by December 13, 2024. If selected, grantees may only incur eligible expenditures after the grant contract is fully executed and the grant has reached its effective date.

## Match Requirements and Explanation

There is no match required for this program. Match should not be submitted and will not be scored as a part of the proposal for this program.

## Minimum Requirements

Applicants must meet the minimum requirements to be considered for this grant opportunity. Minimum requirements are:

- Demonstrating the ability to implement the project and submit the final report by September 30, 2028.
- Providing photo documentation of the project's progress at appropriate phases, and illustrations, diagrams, charts, graphs, and maps to show results. All trees planted must be mapped and submitted.
- Publicly posting and promoting grant project information and purpose.
- Be willing to complete a form regarding debarment, suspension, and fiscal responsibility measures before going into to contract.
- Complying with all Federal and State laws and regulations related to the completion of projects, as stated in the grant agreement.
- Must be an equal opportunity provider and employer.

## Additional Criteria

- Tree or Urban Forestry educational trainings offered to the public must be conducted or advised by staff or contractors with a degree in an urban and community forestry, forest management, or a related field, or related certifications (International Society of Arboriculture (ISA) Certified Arborist, Tree Care Industry Association (TCIA) accreditations).
- Tree planting projects must follow standards set in [A Pocket Guide to Planting Trees](#)
- Tree planting projects must include a 3-year maintenance plan
- Tree planting projects must identify tree species; site location; and number, size, and type of planting stock
- Species lists are encouraged to increase the diversity of the community's tree canopy and work toward the 20-10-5 guidelines, meaning a community has no more than 20% of their trees within a single family, no more than 10% of their trees within a single genus, and no more than 5% of their trees within a single species. If your community does not have a completed tree survey, contact the DNR at [ucf.dnr@state.mn.us](mailto:ucf.dnr@state.mn.us) to receive your community's 2010 tree survey.
- Species list for trees must be submitted and approved by DNR prior to planting.
  - Species list and numbers can be amended following the submission of tree inventory/survey data.
  - Tree stock can be ¾-2 inch caliper bareroot or a container class size #20 or smaller. DNR recommends trees be purchased with a one-year warranty. Flexibility is possible where desired stock is unavailable.
  - Balled and burlapped trees are not eligible for reimbursement through this grant program.

## Eligible Project Expenses

Eligible project expenses are those incurred through activities that are directly related and necessary to produce the outcomes described in the application. All tree work should be conducted or overseen by professionals with a qualifying credential. Grant funds can be used for, but will not be limited to:

- Printing or purchases of engagement or educational materials
- Staff time for conducting engagement, outreach, or administrative work related to the project.
- Professional contracts for technical assistance or project implementation by individuals or organizations not a part of the organization (including tree removal and replanting)
- Site preparation and planting, including trees, mulch, watering bags, staking materials, and tree wrap or guards. Activities requiring special vehicle licenses or risk to personal or property safety should be conducted by licensed contractors.
- Equipment purchases with a unit cost less than \$5,000 that are used to complete the project
- Equipment rental
- Gravel bed construction
- Purchasing and planting of trees to increase diversity of community tree canopy

## Ineligible Project Expenses

Ineligible project expenses include, but are not limited to:

- Costs incurred prior to the start date on the fully executed grant agreement

- Purchase of trees listed on the Noxious Weed and Minnesota Invasive Terrestrial Plants lists, including Amur cork tree, Amur maple, autumn olive, black locust, buckthorn, Callery pear, Norway maple, Russian olive, Siberian elm, and tree of heaven
- Purchase of balled and burlapped trees, containerized trees larger than #20, and bareroot trees greater than 2" caliper diameter
- Purchase of tree species that already make up 10% or more of the community's public trees, or whose family makes up 20% or more of the public trees
- Purchase of chemicals for insecticide treatment for personal application
- Purchase of plants such as living ground covers, sod, grass seed, and flowers
- Purchase of land or easements
- Major soil and grade changes or construction
- Equipment purchases with a unit cost equal to or exceeding \$5,000
- Experimental practices not approved by DNR

Questions about additional eligible or ineligible expenses can be directed to [ucf.dnr@state.mn.us](mailto:ucf.dnr@state.mn.us).

## Application Instructions

When filling out the application, ensure all sections are completed and the application is submitted by the deadline. Pay close attention to requested information and respond to all questions. If funded, application answers will be incorporated into the grant work plan; therefore, make sure enough information is provided, especially in the timeline and budget sections, to serve as a complete workplan. Clearly demonstrate how the application connects to eligible activities. An initial interest form is available for applicants who do not have previous experience applying for state funding, and/or those interested in receiving additional assistance preparing their application. After submission of the initial interest form, applicants will be provided up to 1.5 hours of technical assistance by DNR staff to support them in completing a full application. A complete application will consist of the following documents, submitted in two parts:

- Completed Exhibit A: Centering Communities in Canopy Solutions application form
- General budget (Excel, format unchanged, additional lines added as needed)
- Letter(s) of support, if collaborating with an outside organization (any format acceptable)
- 3-Year tree maintenance plan for newly planted trees, if planting trees (PDF, format unchanged)
- Species and stock list from which trees will be planted, if planting trees (any format acceptable; contact [ucf.dnr@state.mn.us](mailto:ucf.dnr@state.mn.us) with questions about species eligibility)

## Application Submission Instructions

After reading through the Request for Application, complete all parts of the initial interest form found [online](#). Grant applicants are required to submit initial interest forms by email to [ucf.dnr@state.mn.us](mailto:ucf.dnr@state.mn.us) by October 7, 2024. Following initial review by DNR, an Urban and Community Forestry (UCF) staff member will follow-up with feedback on project ideas before applicants complete full application. Technical guidance will be provided to ensure enough detail has been outlined to proceed to full application step. This technical assistance will be provided through virtual appointments before October 18, 2024.

Applications must be received electronically by October 28, 2024 at 11:59 pm, to be considered eligible for further consideration by grant committee and potential funding. DNR is not responsible for any technical or

logistical problems causing an application to be received late. The applicant is responsible for ensuring their submission is received by DNR by the deadline; applications received after the deadline will not be eligible for consideration. All applicants will be notified by December 13, 2024, whether project is to be funded.

Review Process and Timeline

A UCF Grants Steering Committee, made up of Department of Natural Resources Forestry staff, external environmental justice community professionals, and select stakeholders, will recommend projects and award amounts. The steering committee will evaluate all eligible and complete applications received by the deadline. DNR will review all committee recommendations and is responsible for final award decisions. The award decisions of DNR are final and not subject to appeal.

Table with 2 columns: Event/Task and Date. Rows include: RFA posted on the DNR website (Sept 9, 2024), Initial Interest Form available (Sept 9, 2024), Full Request for Application available (Sept 9, 2024), Initial Interest Questions due (Oct 2, 2024), Initial Interest Form due (Oct 7, 2024), Technical Assistance for Initial Interest Submissions provided by (Oct 14, 2024), Application Questions due (Oct 22, 2024), Applications due (Oct 28, 2024), Application Grant Review Process (four weeks), Project Selection; Grant Agreement Negotiations Begin (Dec 13, 2024), Work Plans Approved, Contracts Executed, Grant Work Begins (March 1, 2025), All Grant Work Completed, Final Reimbursement Request Submitted (Sept 30, 2028).

Required Financial and Grantee Capacity Review Eligible Project Expenses

Minn. Stat. §16B.981 requires that a pre-award risk assessment is conducted for grant awards of \$50,000 or more. All applicants, except Tribal Governments, applying for grants in the state of Minnesota must undergo a financial and capacity review prior to a grant award of \$50,000 and higher.

To comply with this requirement, a successful applicant will be asked to provide more information before the grant agreement is fully executed, including but not limited to:

- A checklist focusing on history of performing similar work, internal controls, and current staffing and budget.
• Certifications that no current principals have been convicted of a felony financial crime in the last ten years.
• For non-profits: evidence of good standing with the secretary of state, recent 990s and audited financial statements (if applicable).

The submission of inaccurate or misleading information may be grounds for disqualification from the grant contract agreement award and may subject an organization to suspension or debarment proceedings, as well as other remedies available to the State, by law.

The results of this review will be used to determine whether there are any concerns about the applicant's ability to successfully complete the grant. If there are concerns, the DNR will follow the Office of Grant Management (OGM) [Policy 08-06](#) in resolving them.

## Questions

Submit questions to [ucf.dnr@state.mn.us](mailto:ucf.dnr@state.mn.us). Answers will be posted weekly [online](#). Questions must be submitted no later than October 22, 2024, to be included on the website.

## Data Privacy and Trade Secret Notice

The information provided by an applicant will be used to assess the applicant's eligibility to receive a grant. The decision to apply for this grant is voluntary, and applicants are not legally required to provide any of the requested information. Applicants may decline to complete this application without any legal consequence. However, only completed applications will be considered for a grant; incomplete applications will not be considered.

Applications are private or non-public until opened. Once the applications are opened, the name and address of the applicant and the amount requested is public. All other data in an application is private or non-public data until all agreements are fully executed. After DNR has completed the evaluation process, all remaining data in the applications is public with the exception of trade secret data as defined and classified in Minn. Stat. § 13.37. A statement by a grantee that the application is copyrighted or otherwise protected does not prevent public access to the application (Minn. Stat. § 13.599, subd. 3).

## Liability and Project Implementation

DNR will not be held liable for any costs incurred by any organization for work performed in the preparation and production of a proposal, nor for any work performed prior to the execution of the contract. Project work and expenses that are eligible for reimbursement with grant funds CANNOT be started or incurred until the grant contract is fully executed. Grant agreements are expected to be finalized by March 1, 2025. Related grant project work can begin after all signatures are obtained. Interim reports and final reports will be required for all grant-funded projects.

Minnesota Department of Agriculture considers **May 1 – September 30** to be the flight season for emerald ash borer (EAB). This means that EAB adult beetles are emerging from infested wood or trees and flying in search of new hosts during this time. The best management practice is to not remove ash trees when EAB are actively flying (May-September), to avoid the risk of EAB emerging from this material in transit or at a processing or disposal location.

## Reimbursement

All funds will be awarded on a reimbursement basis. Following reimbursement request submissions (provided that work has been completed without issue), grants funds will be reimbursed up to 90%, with the final 10% retained until the project is completed. The Reimbursement Request Form and required reports must be received bi-yearly until the expiration of funding in 2027.

1. June 2, 2025
2. December 1, 2025
3. June 1, 2026
4. December 1, 2026
5. June 1, 2027
6. December 2, 2027

## Project Completion

All project work must be completed, and the final request for reimbursement (along with final reports) must be submitted by September 30, 2028.

## Other Considerations

DNR reserves the right to:

- Post funded applications and reports, including images and maps, to the DNR website
- Reject any or all proposals received
- Waive or modify minor irregularities in proposals received after prior notification and agreement of applicant
- Clarify the scope of this program, within the RFA requirements and with appropriate notice to potential applicants, to best serve the interests of the state of Minnesota
- Amend program specifications after the RFA release, with appropriate notice to potential applicants
- Require a good faith effort on the part of the grantee to work with DNR subsequent to project completion to develop or implement project results
- Withhold any payments or cancel contracts when contract conditions are not met



### Exhibit A: Application evaluation score sheet

#### Selection Criteria and Weight

The steering committee will be reviewing each eligible application on a 100-point scale. Scores will be used to develop final recommendations. Applicants are encouraged to score their own applications using the evaluation score sheet before submitting the application. While not required, this step may help applicants meet the criteria that grant reviewers will be scoring.

Applications to the Centering Community in Canopy Solutions Grants will be evaluated and ranked according to the following criteria and points	Points
<b>1. Priority Points</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EJ communities are engaged, input is incorporated prior to project implementation and planned throughout the project</li> <li>• Applicant describes plan for employing community members in conducting urban and community forestry outreach, engagement, planting or maintenance activities to benefit their neighborhoods.</li> <li>• Applicant demonstrates actionable items for EJ communities (i.e. diverse strategies for engagement and education, outreach offered in multiple languages, added inclusion), impacts are clear and tangible</li> </ul>	15
<b>2. Project Overview and Need</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Application is clear and complete</li> <li>• Project clearly and exclusively serves EJ communities</li> <li>• Community has a readiness to take on a project of the proposed scope and size</li> <li>• Project focuses on significant positive impact on canopy equity</li> </ul>	30
<b>3. Project Timeline</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Timeline provides specific dates for all activities</li> <li>• Timeline is easy to read and comprehend</li> <li>• Timeline follows best management practices for tree maintenance or removal</li> <li>• Timeline includes 3-year maintenance plan for trees planted</li> </ul>	20
<b>4. Project Budget and Budget Explanation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Budget explanation provides specific dollar amounts for anticipated use</li> <li>• Budget totals equal amount requested</li> <li>• Financially realistic and cost effective</li> <li>• Project seeks to replant more trees than removed</li> </ul>	10
<b>5. Communications</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication strategies directly related to project accomplishments, activities, or both, and multiple forms of communication are listed with potential to reach the public</li> </ul>	15
<b>6. Key Personnel</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Key personnel are listed with corresponding project roles</li> <li>• All certifications and education degrees are listed for staff or contractors</li> <li>• A high scoring community will have staff or contractors with a degree in a related field, or a combination/multiple staff with ISA Certified Arborist, TCIA accreditations, or both</li> </ul>	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>