



**DEPARTMENT OF
NATURAL RESOURCES**

Growing Tomorrow's Tree Care Professionals

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 U.S. Department of Agriculture are equal opportunity employers and providers.

Grant Overview

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources welcomes applications from education institutions, professional associations, local units of government, and non-profit organizations within Minnesota that will enhance the professional development of populations in environmental justice communities through arboriculture and urban and community forestry workforce development.

Eligible Activities

The following activities are eligible only if they are serving members of environmental justice communities. All efforts done by grantees must serve environmental justice communities.

- Urban and community forestry or arboriculture education and career focused outreach
- Professional certifications and/or training for members of environmental justice communities including but not limited to the following:
 - Certificates, diplomas, or degrees issued by a post-secondary institution
 - Registered apprenticeship certification or certificates
 - Occupational licenses or registrations
 - Certifications issued by, or recognized by, industry or professional associations
- Programming aimed at increasing recruitment and retention of members of environmental justice communities
- Adult and youth introductory tree maintenance programming
- Engaging under-represented people in workforce development within environmental justice areas
- Continuing education for environmental justice community members already engaged in industry
- Conducting tree work in environmental justice priority areas as a means of professional education. All work needs to either be focused in areas of environmental justice concern or be benefiting people in a workforce development program who reside in those areas.
- Additional supports to aid program participants in overcoming barriers that may otherwise deter them from program participation. Acceptable support items are listed below:
 - Bus tickets
 - Personal Protective Equipment

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.mn.dnr@state.mn.us.

Eligible Applicants

Eligible applicants include non-profit organizations with 501(c)(3) status, education units, professional associations, and local units of government within Minnesota, including cities, counties, regional authorities, joint powers boards, towns, and Tribal government. Parks and recreation boards in cities of the first class are also eligible to apply.

An eligible applicant has or will have a training program that shows the ability to recruit, train, and/or retain members of environmental justice communities within the tree care industry.

Funding

The DNR has \$2,269,107 available in U.S. Department of Agriculture – Forest Service Inflation Reduction Act dollars to fund projects expanding access to arboriculture education through education and program support of youth and professionals in environmental justice communities. There is no minimum to the dollar amount applicants can request. The maximum amount that will be funded is \$500,000.

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 **November 5th, 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 attached to applications 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:

- Showing the ability to implement the project, meet all grant objectives, and submit a final report by June 15th, 2028.
- Provide documentation of meeting project objectives at appropriate phases along project implementation.
- Publicly posting and promoting grant project information and purpose.
- 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.
- Be willing to complete a form regarding debarment, suspension, and fiscal responsibility measures before going into to contract.

Additional Criteria

- Any education provided through this program must be conducted by an ISA Certified Arborist, TCIA accreditation or equivalent qualification, or must qualify for ISA continuing education units.
- Grantees should show demonstrated efforts to remove workplace barriers for participants as well as create an accepting and inclusive culture within their organization. This may include cultural competency training; diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) training and initiatives; defined workplace guidelines surrounding addressing barriers; etc.

Priority Projects

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.

Eligible Project Expenses

Eligible project expenses are those incurred through project activities that are directly related and necessary to produce the outcomes described in the project application. Grant funds can be used for, but will not be limited to:

- Materials and staff time used to educate, engage, and conduct outreach to environmental justice communities.
- Expenses associated with additional supports to overcome barriers. Expenses for additional supports should be outlined in the application and budget.
- Materials and staff time used to recruit and retain members of environmental justice communities within the field of urban and community forestry and arboriculture.

- Materials and staff time used to provide introductory training and ongoing professional development to members of environmental justice communities.

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
- Purchasing of land or easements
- Capital expenditures (items with a unit cost of \$5,000 or more), such as buildings, motor vehicles, or permanent structures
- Experimental practices not approved by DNR

Questions about additional eligible or ineligible expenses can be directed to 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 the requested information and respond to all questions. Detailed responses and completeness are strongly encouraged: if funded, application answers will become a grantee's work plan. Make sure enough information is provided, especially in the timeline and budget sections, to serve as a complete work plan. Grantees will need to meet the objectives stated in their work plans by the end of the grant program. Clearly demonstrate how the application connects to eligible activities, and make sure that no ineligible project expenses are listed for grant funding.

A complete application will consist of the following documents:

1. Application form Exhibit A (Word Doc, follow formatting requirements)
2. Budget (Excel, format unchanged, additional lines added as needed)
3. Letter of Support, *if collaborating with an outside organization* (any format acceptable)

Application Submission Instructions

After reading through the Request for Applications, complete all parts of the application found [online](#). Grant applicants are required to submit applications by email to ucf.dnr@state.mn.us. Applications must be received electronically by **October 8, 2024**, to be considered eligible for 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 **November 5th, 2024**, whether or not their project is to be funded.

Review Process and Timeline

A UCF Grants Steering Committee, made up of Department of Natural Resources Forestry staff, Department of Agriculture staff, 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.*

RFA posted on the DNR website	August 22, 2024
Application Questions due	September 24, 2024
Applications due.....	October 8, 2024
Application Grant Review Process.....	four weeks
Project Selection; Grant Agreement Negotiations Begin.....	November 5, 2024

Work Plans Approved, Contracts Executed, Grant Work Begins January 15, 2025

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.
- When applicable: evidence of good standing with the secretary of state, recent 990s and audited financial statements (if applicable).
- For-profit entities only: Certification that company is not currently under bankruptcy proceedings.

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 [OGM Policy 08-06](#) in resolving them.

Questions:

Submit questions to ucf.dnr@state.mn.us. Answers will be posted weekly [online](#). Questions must be submitted no later than September 24th, 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 firm 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 **January 15th, 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.

Reimbursement

All funds will be awarded on a reimbursement basis. Following reimbursement request submissions (provided that work has been completed without issue), grant funds will be reimbursed up to 90%, with the final 10% retained until the project is completed. When requesting reimbursement, the reimbursement request form and required reports must be received by:

1. June 15, 2025
2. December 15, 2025
3. June 15, 2026
4. December 15, 2026
5. June 15, 2027
6. December 15, 2027
7. June 15, 2028

Project Completion

All project work must be completed, and the final request for reimbursement (along with final reports) must be submitted by **June 15, 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 Growing Tomorrow's Tree Care Professionals grant will be evaluated and ranked according to the following criteria and points:	Points
1. Project Overview and Need <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Application is clear, complete, and descriptive • Related training and education both supports and follows tree care industry best management practices (e.g. ANSI A300, ANSI Z133) • Grantee has a readiness to take on a project of the proposed scope and size • Grantee demonstrates ability to recruit and train individuals from environmental justice communities in the tree care industry. Efforts for retaining individuals from environmental justice communities in the tree care industry are not required but should be included in this section if applicable. 	30
2. Project Timeline <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timeline provides specific dates for all activities • Timeline is easy to read and comprehend • Timeline accounts for grant program reporting and end dates 	15
3. Project Budget and Budget Explanation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budget explanation provides specific dollar amounts for anticipated use • Budget totals equal amount requested • Financially realistic and cost effective 	10
4. Project Impacts on Priority Populations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning and collaboration clearly serves communities living within identified environmental justice areas (communities with higher populations of low-income residents, tribal communities, areas experiencing inequities in environmental quality, or a combination of these categories) • Communities in areas of environmental justice concern are engaged and input is incorporated prior to project implementation and throughout the project • Applicant demonstrates actionable items for these communities (examples include program focal areas, outreach offered in multiple languages, added inclusion), impacts on diverse populations are clear and tangible • Grantee provides examples of current efforts to create an accepting and inclusive workplace within their organization. Examples may include DEI training, organizational policy for addressing systemic barriers and inequities, cultural competency training, etc. • Grantee demonstrates ability to provide or connect participants with additional employment opportunities beyond grant award period 	25
6. Communications <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication strategies directly related to project accomplishments, activities, or both, and multiple forms of communication are listed with potential to reach the public 	10

<p>7. Key Personnel</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key personnel are listed with corresponding project roles • Key personnel have demonstrated background, degree in related field, or combination to meet their roles within the project. For example, tree care is taught by someone who has an ISA certification, etc. • All certifications and education degrees are listed for staff or contractors • Grantee 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 	10
Total	100