



Tree Equity Handbook

A Practical Guide to Closing the Canopy Gap Between Neighborhoods

ACTIVITY 1.2

→ Priority Area Mapping

Toolkit 1: Collect Baseline Data

Issued November 2025



Activity 1.2: Priority Area Mapping

Toolkit 1

Collect Baseline Data

Trees are essential to public health and well-being. You probably recognize the need for more tree infrastructure in your community — maybe you've even explored Tree Equity Score — and now you're ready to chart a course of action that leads to greener, safer and more resilient neighborhoods. So where do you start?

Begin by establishing a strong data foundation. In this toolkit, you'll use Tree Equity Score to gather data about trees in your community, identify areas with the greatest need and set priorities for the future. At every step, you'll gather robust data that can help you make the case for investment, policy change and strategic action in pursuit of Tree Equity.

Let's get started!

Activity Map

→ [Basic Data Gathering](#)

Priority Area Mapping

→ [In-Person Observation](#)

Priority Area Mapping



Overview & Basic Steps

Adopting an equity-first approach to urban forestry involves prioritizing investments in areas with the greatest need. Use Tree Equity Score data to find areas in your community where residents are more likely to be impacted by extreme heat, pollution and other environmental hazards which could be reduced with the benefits of trees. Follow step-by-step instructions to use Tree Equity Score to determine priority areas based on data.

Before you begin this activity, we recommend familiarizing yourself with the [Tree Equity Score National Explorer](#).

Suggested Time: 1–2 days

Level of Difficulty: Moderate

Participants: Individuals responsible for project planning, advocacy or communications

Instructions

- 1 Open the [Tree Equity Score National Explorer](#) and locate your geographic area on the map.
- 2 Choose from three simple methods that use decision support tools available in Tree Equity Score to pinpoint priority areas:
 - **Method 1: Set region-wide priorities** based on Tree Equity Score targets for your city, county, district or state.
 - **Method 2: Create custom criteria** that reflect local priorities.
 - **Method 3: Find supporting data for specific areas** that you have already decided to prioritize.
- 3 Finalize a map and a list of priority areas with key data for each area.

After you complete this activity:

- Validate your priorities through real-world observations. → [Activity 1.3](#)
- Form a coalition around shared goals. → [Toolkit 2](#)
- Engage with the community to strengthen your initiative. → [Toolkit 3](#)

TOOLKIT 1: Priority Area Mapping | Activity 2 – WORKSHEET

Why use Tree Equity Score to identify priority areas?

If you've completed the **Basic Data Gathering** activity already ([Activity 1.1](#)), you know that Tree Equity Score puts a wealth of data at your fingertips. This data can be a powerful tool to inform your strategic planning and strengthen your efforts. Setting quantitative criteria for Tree Equity will demonstrate to your community, funders, boards and leadership why you recommend prioritizing specific areas in your community, and a data-informed approach will help you make a stronger case and gain buy-in for the work.

How many priority areas should be targeted?

The prioritization methods in this activity are rooted in the principle that local strategies should be tailored to reflect local contexts. All three methods will help you identify geographic areas with the greatest need within your community and establish a strong foundation of data to support your work.

Tree Equity Score targets are not one-size-fits-all. The planning tools allow you to set criteria that identify a feasible number of areas to prioritize based on your capacity, the scale of your work, your budget or your local context. For example, a small nonprofit interested in tree care activities might focus on just 3–5 census block groups; it would select narrower criteria to identify those areas. Alternatively, a large city interested in long-term planning might use broader criteria to produce a list of 100 priority block groups across the city.

Tips for planning work in priority areas:

- When taking the next steps to plan tree planting and tree care activities in priority areas, conduct in-person site assessments and seek input from local experts and neighbors. This helps ensure that actions are tailored to the specific needs and characteristics of each neighborhood.
- Equity means meeting a community with the resources that they identify as essential for their well-being and ability to thrive. Building meaningful relationships, conducting outreach and forming community partnerships are essential aspects of any successful Tree Equity project. Toolkits 2 and 3 will help you start this process.

Terminology Tip

The Tree Equity Score National Explorer uses **U.S. Census block groups**. These are the smallest units you can select on the interactive map. You will often see “block group” used in worksheets, where you may be prompted to enter a group’s unique 12-digit ID number. You may also see “block group” used interchangeably with “neighborhood” or “area” — in this case, these terms are used to describe contained regions within communities. Keep in mind that census block groups may not align perfectly with neighborhood boundaries in your community.

Prioritization Methods

Using Tree Equity Score tools, choose from three simple methods to pinpoint priority areas.

Method 1: Set Region-Wide Priorities

To guide first steps, identify the areas in your city, county, congressional district or state with the greatest need based on their Tree Equity Score. At this stage, don't worry too much about whether you have the budget to ramp up your maintenance program or plant the exact number of trees suggested by Tree Equity Score. Instead, focus on pinpointing areas or neighborhoods that have the most to gain from expanding the tree canopy. Your selection will guide how you talk about Tree Equity, where to focus your first steps and how best to collect data to build your case.

1. Click on any census block group to generate a list of related reports (top right).
2. Select the report appropriate for the scale you work at — city/town, county, congressional district or state. This will open a Location Insights report for the area you selected.

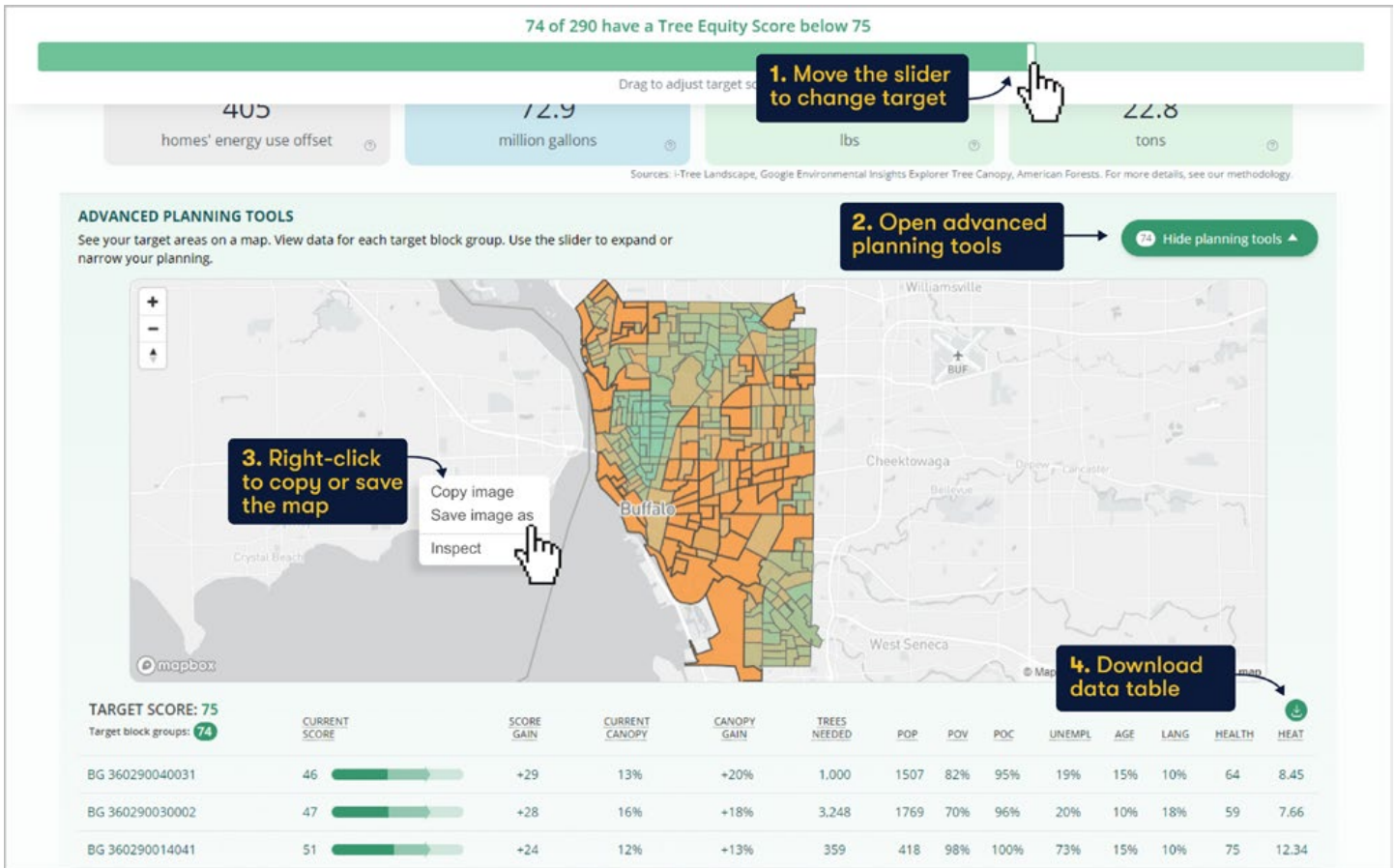
Priority Areas | Instructions on next page



Location Name:

Tree Equity Score Target:

Number of Target Block Groups:



- In the “Start Planning” section, adjust the slider to set your Tree Equity Score target (e.g., 80, 85, 90). Changing the target will also change the metrics displayed below, such as canopy expansion needs and potential carbon, water and air benefits to the community.
- Under “Advanced Planning Tools,” select the option to expand planning tools on the right-hand side. This will reveal a map and data table showing targeted neighborhoods based on your chosen Tree Equity Target.
- Continue to adjust the Tree Equity Score Target in the slider until you have a number of priority block groups that seems relevant to your goals and feasible for your current capacity and resources. Record the target and the number of block groups below.
- Download a map of your target block groups. Right-click on the map to save it to a dedicated folder on your computer or copy the image into a document.
- Next, create a list of priority block groups using key data provided in the table.

Tip: Use a free design software like Canva, or a presentation tool like PowerPoint, to add text boxes to your map that label geographic points of interest or project locations.

Tip: You can click the download icon in the top-right corner of the table to save a .csv file, copy/paste the text directly into a spreadsheet, record information manually in the **Data Table Template** on [page 15](#), or simply take screenshots. The table is pre-sorted from lowest to highest scores, with lower scores typically treated as higher priority.

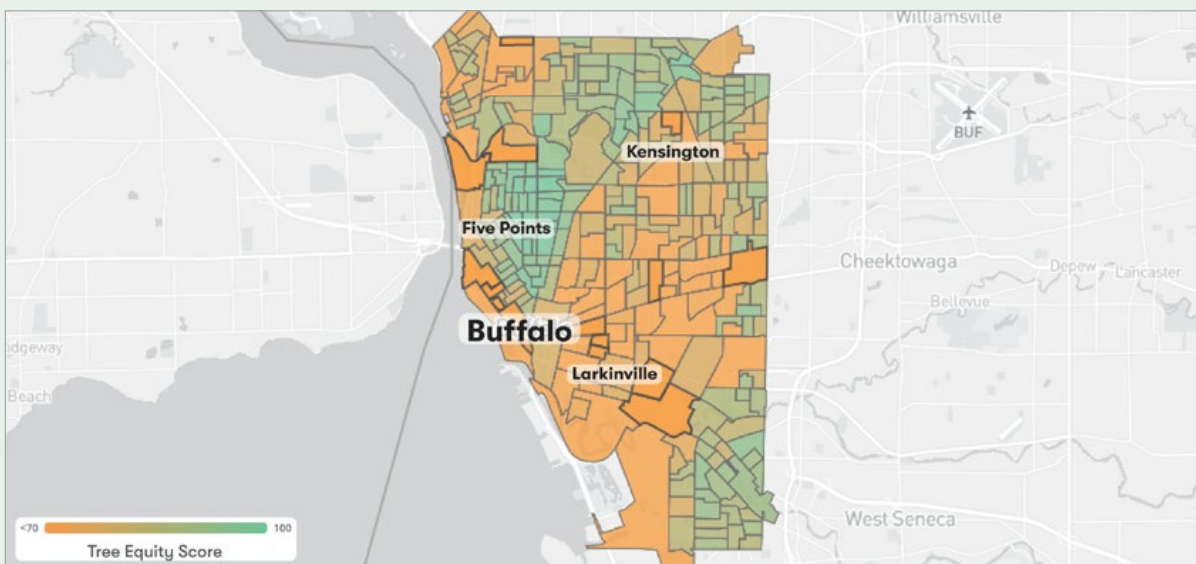
See next page for a completed example

Region-Wide Priorities Sample

Location Name: Buffalo, NY

Tree Equity Score Target: 60

Number of Target Block Groups: 15

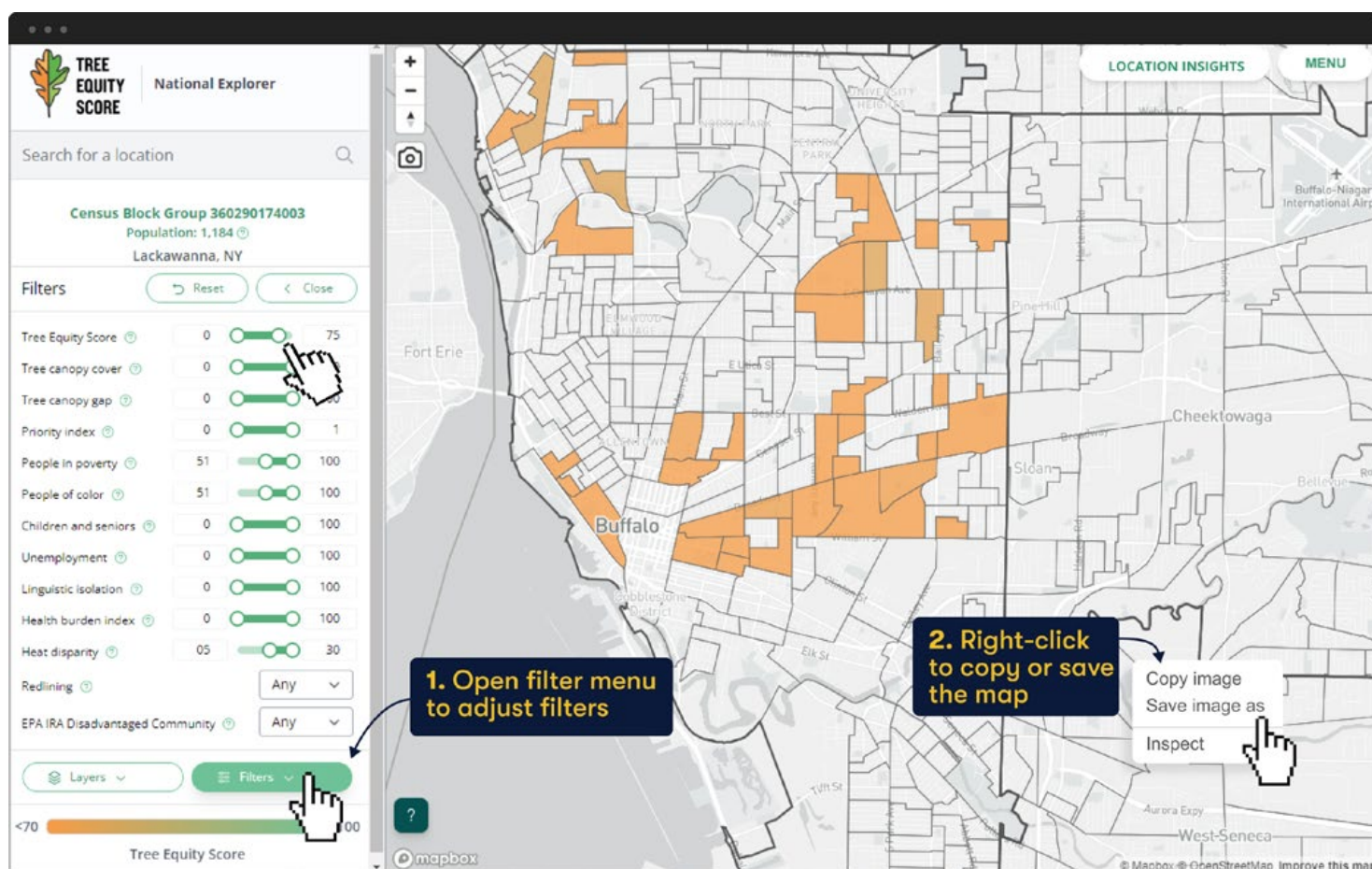


TARGET SCORE: 60	CURRENT SCORE	SCORE GAIN	CURRENT CANOPY	CANOPY GAIN	TREES NEEDED	POP	POV	POC	UNEMPL	AGE	LANG	HEALTH	HEAT
Target block groups: 15													
BG 360290040031	46	+14	13%	+9%	482	1507	82%	95%	19%	15%	10%	64	8.45
BG 360290030002	47	+13	16%	+8%	1,446	1769	70%	96%	20%	10%	18%	59	7.66
BG 360290014041	51	+9	12%	+5%	127	418	98%	100%	73%	15%	10%	75	12.34
BG 360290071032	51	+9	10%	+5%	156	1342	90%	89%	10%	8%	29%	62	7.07
BG 360290071044	52	+8	8%	+5%	71	1335	71%	95%	20%	7%	18%	62	8.08
BG 360290163001	52	+8	11%	+7%	1,021	703	91%	48%	30%	5%	0%	63	5.51
BG 360290163003	54	+6	9%	+5%	1,367	905	75%	36%	19%	13%	0%	63	8.67
BG 360290014031	55	+5	5%	+4%	103	475	62%	100%	5%	33%	5%	75	10.93
BG 360290171001	56	+4	14%	+3%	423	872	70%	77%	12%	5%	7%	64	-0.6
BG 360290071021	57	+3	13%	+2%	164	1256	100%	89%	15%	16%	11%	55	8.28
BG 360290056001	58	+2	7%	+1%	34	830	77%	85%	6%	3%	9%	55	10.74
BG 360290070002	58	+2	15%	+1%	124	868	74%	69%	0%	10%	8%	57	3.91
BG 360290171005	58	+2	14%	+2%	218	874	73%	71%	6%	9%	7%	64	6.22
BG 360290014042	59	+1	10%	+0%	2	150	82%	97%	0%	27%	10%	75	9.83
BG 360290027031	59	+1	13%	+0%	22	1248	86%	92%	6%	6%	25%	74	8.18

Method 2: Create Custom Criteria

Tree Equity Score provides a wealth of information beyond the score itself – you can isolate specific indicators such as heat severity, poverty rates, age or health burden. Use factors of your choosing in addition to – or in place of – Tree Equity Score to identify priority areas based on your community’s specific needs, challenges and values.

1. From the map, click on “Filters.” You can now adjust filters for a number of key indicators using sliders – this will modify the map, “filtering out” the areas that do not meet your criteria and leaving priority areas on the map.
2. Tailor your criteria by applying filters like heat severity, poverty rates or health burden that reflect local priorities and concerns – you can adjust multiple indicators at a time.
3. As you adjust filters, note how many neighborhoods remain on the map. If you aim to narrow down to fewer priority block groups, set narrower filters. Broaden your filter criteria to capture a greater number of priority block groups.





Location:			
Indicator	Criteria: =, >, < or "any"	Indicator	Criteria: =, >, < or "any"
Tree Equity Score		Children and seniors	
Tree canopy cover		Unemployment	
Tree canopy gap		Linguistic isolation	
Priority index		Health burden index	
People in poverty		Heat disparity	
People of color			

Number of block groups targeted:

4. Record your filter criteria.
5. Now save an image of your filtered map – right-click to either save it to your computer or paste it into a document. (Don't forget to include a screenshot of the map legend and add text boxes to mark important locations or points of interest.)
6. While this method does not generate a data table of block groups like Method 1 does, you can create a list of target block groups by manually recording data from the map in the **Data Table Template** on [page 15](#). Remember that block group IDs are not critical to this step – in fact, it may be more useful to label target block groups with neighborhood names, landmarks or other identifiers that will be more familiar to community stakeholders.

Tip: If you're more comfortable working with spreadsheets and datasets, you can download your state's raw data from the Tree Equity Score website. → <https://www.treeequityscore.org/methodology>

Select "Data Download" to find your state and download information in your preferred format. The .csv will allow you to open a spreadsheet and filter columns using the same criteria you applied to the map. Each download is also packaged with a data dictionary to help you understand the columns and variables in the spreadsheet.

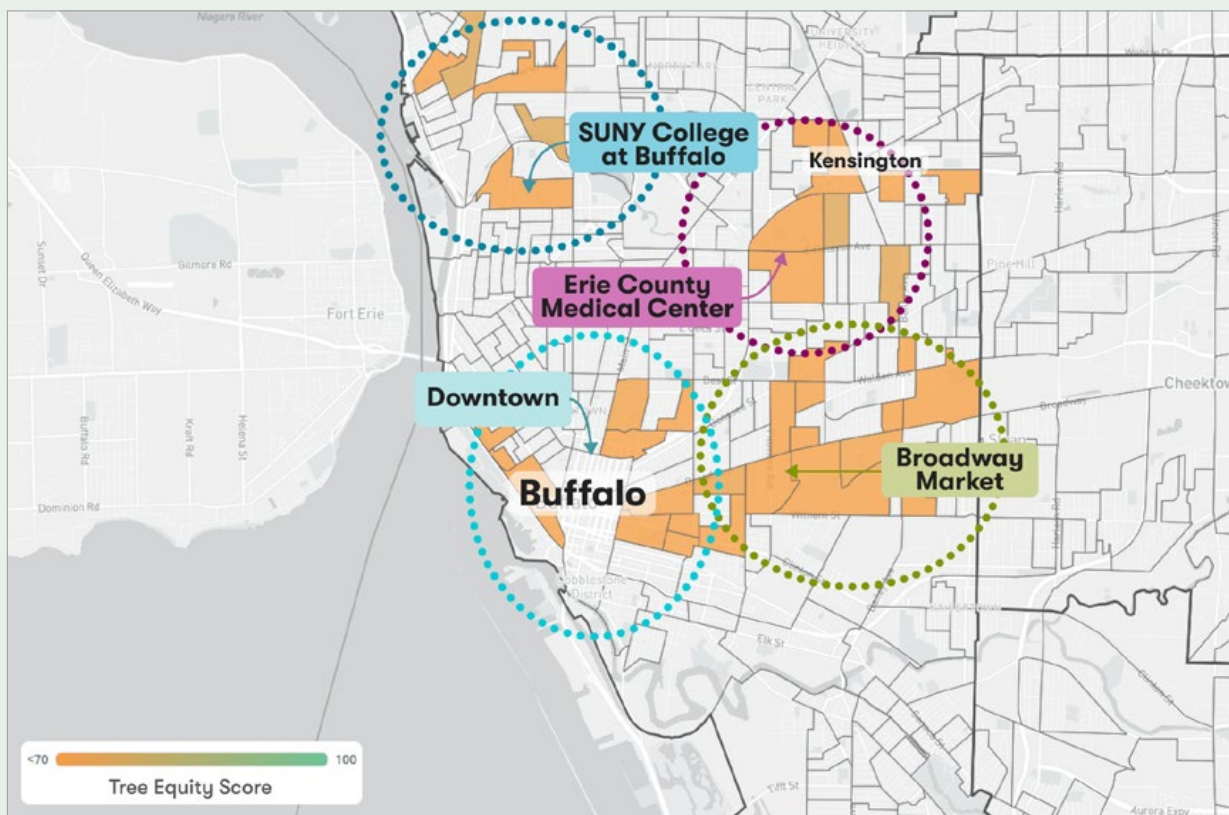
Custom Criteria Sample

Objective: Identify priority areas to host outreach and planting events that will serve low-income residents and residents of color, particularly in neighborhoods hit hard by extreme summer heat. Identify core neighborhoods, then establish centralized locations as hubs to serve those different areas.

Location: Buffalo, NY

Indicator	Criteria: =, >, < or “any”	Indicator	Criteria: =, >, < or “any”
Tree Equity Score	<= 75	Children and seniors	any
Tree canopy cover	any	Unemployment	any
Tree canopy gap	any	Linguistic isolation	any
Priority index	any	Health burden index	any
People in poverty	>= 50%	Heat disparity	>= +5°F
People of color	>= 50%		

Number of block groups targeted: 39



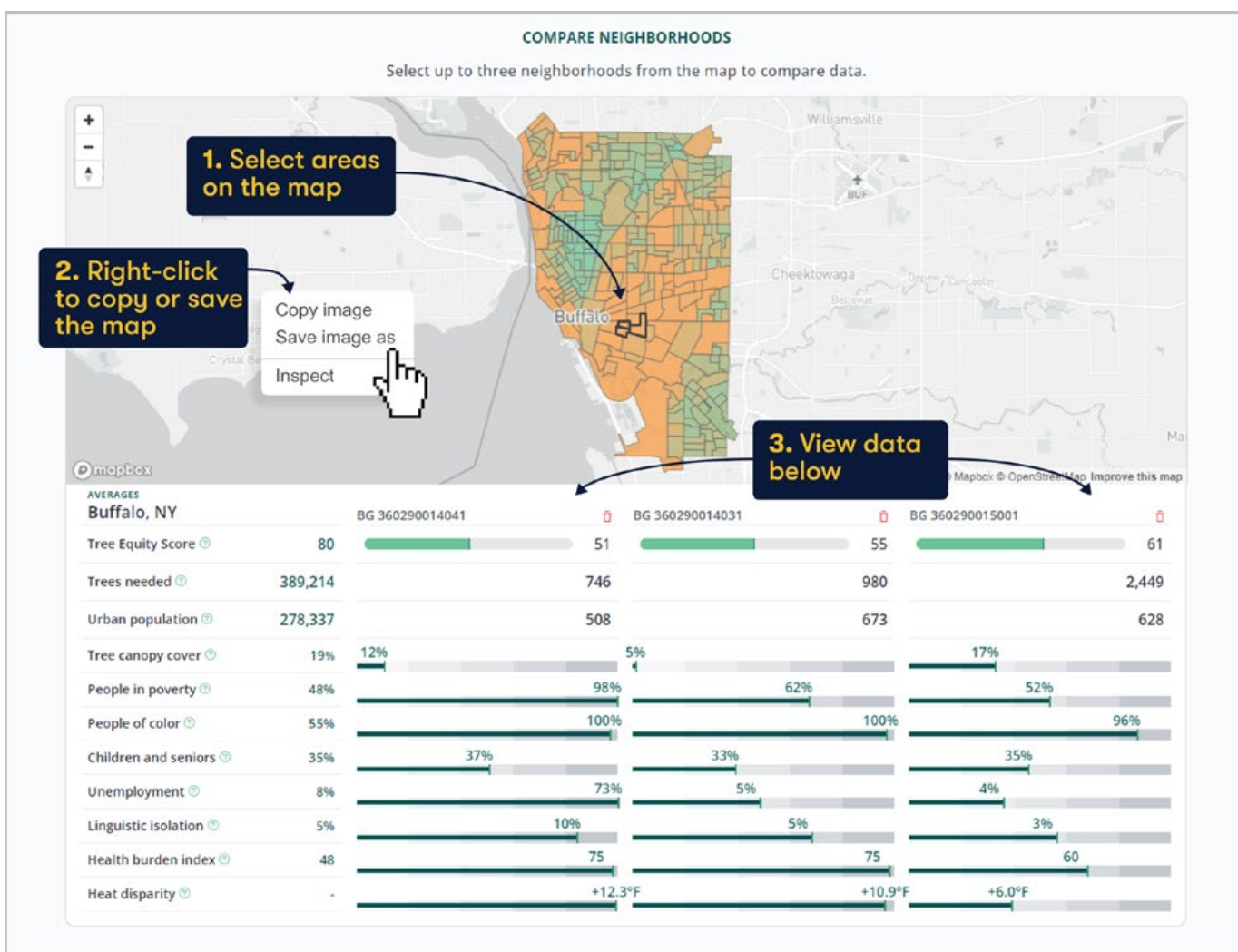
Custom Criteria Sample (continued)

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M
1	GEOID	place	state	Tree Equity Score	Pop	POV	POC	Unempl	Age	Lang	Health	Heat	
2093	360290014031	Buffalo	New York	55	475	62%	100%	5%	33%	5%	75%	10.93	
2094	360290014032	Buffalo	New York	63	1600	63%	96%	3%	47%	5%	75%	11.19	
2095	360290014041	Buffalo	New York	51	418	98%	100%	73%	37%	10%	75%	12.34	
2096	360290014042	Buffalo	New York	59	150	82%	97%	0%	29%	10%	75%	9.83	
2097	360290015001	Buffalo	New York	61	904	52%	96%	4%	35%	3%	60%	6.04	
2098	360290015002	Buffalo	New York	72	566	61%	96%	27%	44%	3%	60%	5.3	
2100	360290016011	Buffalo	New York	67	1931	72%	79%	16%	38%	3%	78%	7.7	
2101	360290016021	Buffalo	New York	66	1249	74%	75%	22%	39%	2%	78%	6.72	
2109	360290023003	Buffalo	New York	70	512	58%	62%	12%	47%	5%	57%	6.7	
2115	360290024005	Buffalo	New York	71	874	63%	62%	7%	29%	6%	51%	5.05	
2116	360290025021	Buffalo	New York	67	948	69%	80%	14%	37%	1%	56%	9.9	
2119	360290027031	Buffalo	New York	59	1248	86%	92%	6%	36%	25%	74%	8.18	
2120	360290027041	Buffalo	New York	62	1006	84%	85%	13%	64%	9%	74%	5.56	
2122	360290027043	Buffalo	New York	64	643	72%	78%	5%	48%	9%	74%	8.33	
2124	360290028012	Buffalo	New York	69	430	66%	73%	10%	49%	9%	75%	7.29	
2126	360290029001	Buffalo	New York	70	581	84%	86%	48%	44%	3%	64%	6.53	
2131	360290030002	Buffalo	New York	47	1769	70%	96%	20%	56%	18%	59%	7.66	
2134	360290031002	Buffalo	New York	70	759	55%	89%	11%	48%	6%	56%	5.19	
2136	360290031004	Buffalo	New York	71	479	73%	94%	13%	30%	6%	56%	11.13	
2149	360290034005	Buffalo	New York	67	883	65%	77%	34%	37%	1%	67%	8.99	
2150	360290035011	Buffalo	New York	61	510	76%	100%	26%	48%	20%	68%	7.67	
2154	360290036001	Buffalo	New York	74	795	70%	100%	17%	28%	13%	73%	6.36	
2165	360290039011	Buffalo	New York	63	1080	63%	94%	12%	43%	0%	65%	6.23	
2168	360290040031	Buffalo	New York	46	1507	82%	95%	19%	52%	10%	64%	8.45	
2177	360290042003	Buffalo	New York	68	715	87%	100%	23%	45%	1%	53%	7.77	
2191	360290044021	Buffalo	New York	61	1792	87%	94%	26%	43%	0%	74%	7.55	
2238	360290055004	Buffalo	New York	75	1259	70%	51%	0%	37%	24%	53%	9.23	
2239	360290056001	Buffalo	New York	58	830	77%	85%	6%	30%	9%	55%	10.74	
2241	360290056003	Buffalo	New York	67	1262	81%	83%	6%	41%	9%	55%	8.65	
2244	360290057001	Buffalo	New York	75	662	65%	92%	0%	56%	12%	63%	7.41	

Method 3: Find Supporting Data for Specific Areas

If you already know where you want to work, gather data to support your case for launching initiatives in those specific neighborhoods.

1. Open a Location Insights report for your city/town, county, congressional district or state. Scroll to the “Compare Neighborhoods” section at the bottom of the report.
2. Select up to three block groups from the map at a time. Data for those block groups will appear in a side-by-side comparison below. You can use this tool gather data for your priority areas or to compare them to neighborhoods with higher Tree Equity Scores. Make selections that present a compelling case for Tree Equity and help guide decision making.
3. Download or copy an image of your selected block groups by right-clicking on the map. (Remember to include a map legend and descriptive text boxes of important locations where relevant.)
4. Record data from your priority block groups in the basic template below or in the **Data Table Template** on [page 15](#).



- 4. Record data from your priority block groups in the basic template below or in the **Data Table Template** on [page 15](#).



Priority Area Name:

Tree Equity Score		Children and seniors	
Population		Unemployment	
Tree canopy cover		Linguistic isolation	
People in poverty		Health burden index	
People of color		Heat disparity	

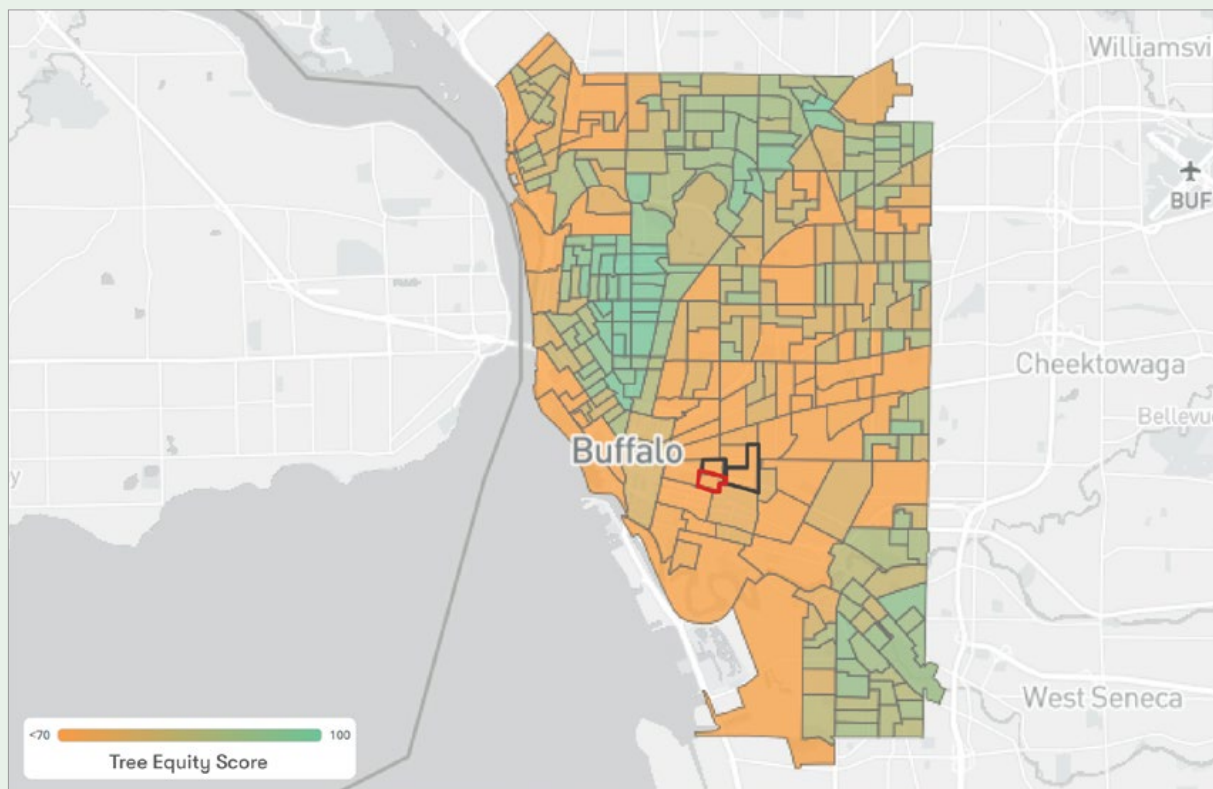
Top reasons this block group is a priority:



Peter K. Afrigile

A participant using Tree Equity Score National Explorer in the workshop “How to make the Most of Tree Equity Score” in Washington, D.C.

Area-Specific Data Sample



Priority Area Name: Larkinville

Tree Equity Score	55	Children and seniors	33%
Population	673	Unemployment	5%
Tree canopy cover	5%	Linguistic isolation	5%
People in poverty	62%	Health burden index	75
People of color	100%	Heat disparity	+10.9°F

Top reasons this block group is a priority:

This neighborhood has one of the lowest Tree Equity Scores in Buffalo, and just 5% tree cover. The neighborhood is 100% residents of color, with 62% living below poverty levels. The area is deeply impacted by severe heat and health burden is high.



Activity 1.2: Priority Area Mapping

Toolkit 1: Collect Baseline Data

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