



Tree Equity Handbook

A Practical Guide to Closing the Canopy Gap Between Neighborhoods

ACTIVITY 2.2

→ Community Partner Cultivation

Toolkit 2: Build an Inclusive Coalition

Issued November 2025



Activity Map

→ [Stakeholder Inventory and Map](#)

Community Partner Cultivation

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Activity 2.2: Community Partner Cultivation

Toolkit 2 Overview: Build an Inclusive Coalition

Urban forests are managed by and for people. They thrive on collaboration. To advance Tree Equity in your community, you will need the support of a strong, inclusive coalition of stakeholders.

Research shows that urban forestry is most impactful when it is positioned as a solution that helps other sectors address their challenges. Seek out coalition members who share your vision, but who might not yet be aware of issues and opportunities related to Tree Equity, to forge new alignments. In this toolkit, you will follow a step-by-step process to bring together diverse, credible and vocal members of a dynamic coalition that will activate a community-wide vision for people and forests.

Community Partner Cultivation



Overview & Basic Steps

It is crucial to understand your audience when addressing complex societal issues like Tree Equity. This analysis will help you identify and cultivate community partners among your stakeholders by understanding how different connections you make can bring valuable social capital and resources to your process and connect you to new audiences. This analysis will also help you more systematically approach barriers to access and opportunities for engagement, collaboration and grassroots organizing to support your shared goals.

Before starting this activity, you might need:

- A comprehensive Stakeholder Inventory and Map → [Activity 2.1](#)

Suggested Time: 2–4 weeks

Level of Difficulty: Challenging

Participants: 1–2 individuals who excel at outreach and relationship development

Instructions

- 1** Identify 5–10 potential community partners who might expand your network or offer critical perspectives and skill sets. Reference your **Stakeholder Inventory Worksheet** ([Activity 2.1](#)) and **Stakeholder Map Worksheet** ([Activity 2.1](#)) for ideas.
- 2** Complete a **Community Partner Profile Worksheet** ([page 6](#)) for each potential partner to systematically evaluate common ground, as well as opportunities for, and barriers to, engaging their grassroots networks.
- 3** Use your deepened understanding to help build your coalition and grow new partnerships.

After you complete this activity:

- Craft a Community Engagement Plan informed by your analysis. → [Activity 3.1](#)
- Formalize relationships with community partners using a written agreement. → [page 9](#)
- Identify individuals who might represent these groups as members of the Tree Equity Coalition. → [Activity 2.4](#)
- Work with community partners to collect grassroots insights that can inform local planning efforts. → [Activity 3.2](#)

TOOLKIT 2: Community Partner Cultivation | Activity 2 – WORKSHEET

Identify Potential Community Partners



Look for organizations, businesses or groups in your community that would be strong partners for your initiative and compile a list of 5–10 entities that could bring unique assets, resources or skills to your coalition. Next, you will need to do a little research to understand specific opportunities for strategic engagement with these candidates.

The best way to learn about potential community partners is to simply have a conversation! Set up a meeting or a call with a group leader or representative. If you can't get in touch, see if you have any mutual contacts who can connect you, such as another group that has collaborated with the stakeholder or your state's urban forestry coordinator. The more you can develop a relationship, the better you can align with potential community partners.

Tip: Refer to your completed **Stakeholder Inventory Worksheet** (Activity 2.1) and **Stakeholder Map Worksheet** (Activity 2.1), looking for stakeholders with strong ties in the community and a clear stake in the outcome of your initiative (even if they might not yet be aware of issues and opportunities related to Tree Equity).

What is a community partner?

A community partner is an external organization, group or business that has a formal, mutually beneficial relationship with your coalition to help address local community issues. Ideally, this partner also expands your network and offers perspectives, resources or skill sets that complement the coalition's capabilities. Community partners might include but are certainly not limited to:

- Faith-based organizations
- Housing and homelessness groups
- Advocacy or service groups
- Immigrant support networks
- Youth or senior citizen groups
- Neighborhood associations

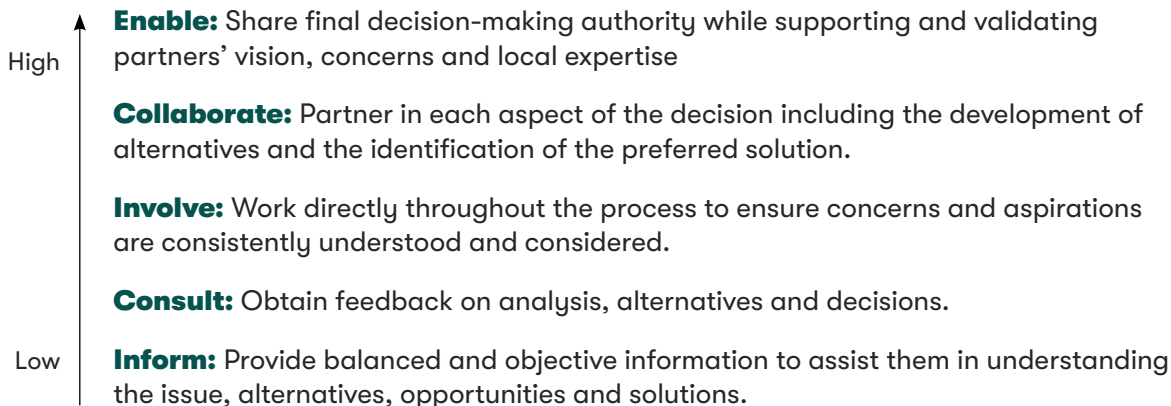
How to start the conversation:

- 1. Introduce yourself.** Give a summary of your efforts to build a local coalition for Tree Equity and share that you hope to find ways to work together.
- 2. Get to know them.** Ask about their current projects and identify common interests.
- 3. Understand potential contributions.** Ask about opportunities to engage with their networks in pursuit of common goals, being sure to note any barriers to participation (see **Community Partner Profile Worksheet** (page 7) for examples).
- 4. Talk next steps.** Find out how they might want to be involved in the planning process or participate in the coalition's efforts.

If you're unable to schedule a conversation, there are other ways to learn about potential community partners. You can consult publicly available information such as annual reports or Form 990s, which are IRS forms filed by tax-exempt organizations that contain information about mission, activities, governance and finances. You can also check their website or social media channels, but be mindful of whether these platforms are regularly updated.

Set the Level of Engagement

Decide on one of five levels of engagement (listed below) for each community partner. Typically, your level of engagement with a community partner is at least “involve,” but your goal should be to “collaborate” while striving to “enable.”



Formalize the Relationship

Once you have established a relationship with a community partner, use the **Partnership Agreement Template** ([page 9](#)) to formally outline the principles of the partnership and how you expect to work together. The agreement should include the purpose and scope of the partnership, roles and responsibilities of each partner, shared goals, expectations and terms.

The key is to formalize these partnerships at the institutional level, not just between individuals, and to focus on developing lasting, strategic and mutually beneficial relationships.

Urban planting with Rooted, sponsored by Microsoft in Cheyenne, Wyoming



Community Partner Profile Worksheet

Fill out this worksheet to create a profile for each potential community partner.



Stakeholder Name

The name of the organization, business or group.

Description

Provide a brief description of the stakeholder's defining attributes, such as its mission, projects, internal culture and staff or volunteer demographics.

Common ground

Make a list of interests and goals that this group has in common with your project. For example: "improve children's health" or "create safe, shared community spaces."

Opportunities for engagement

Make a list of opportunities for alignment or engagement through the stakeholder's existing activities or resources. For example: "they host monthly community suppers" or "they send out weekly bulletin emails to their network" or "they moderate a Facebook group where residents discuss issues and post events."

Barriers to engagement

Make a list of potential barriers to engagement that can be addressed with thoughtful planning. For example: "need English-language communications translated to Spanish" or "constituents need child care to participate" or "transportation barriers."

Level of Engagement

At what level do you hope to engage with this group? Select one.

 Enable (high)

 Collaborate

 Involve

 Consult

 Inform (low)


See next two pages for examples of completed profiles.

Sample Community Partner Profile (1 of 2)

Stakeholder Name

Green Guardians Coalition

Description

The Green Guardians Coalition is a grassroots organization dedicated to promoting environmental stewardship and advocating for trees in urban neighborhoods. Predominantly composed of young adults and families with children. Membership representing largely Asian communities. Strong emphasis on youth engagement and education, fostering a sense of environmental responsibility from an early age.

Common ground

- Environmental stewardship
- Community engagement

Opportunities for engagement

- Dedicated Facebook group where members share updates, resources and event announcements
- Community tree planting events

Barriers to engagement

- Transportation access
- Language barrier considerations

Level of Engagement

At what level do you hope to engage with this group? Select one.

- Enable (high)
 Collaborate
 Involve
 Consult
 Inform (low)



Partnership Agreement Template



Use the template below to create binding agreements between your organization and any community partners who join you in the work. Download a fully editable version on our website. → [Partnership Agreement Template](#)



This Agreement is made on [Date] _____
 between [Your Organization's Name] _____
 (hereafter referred to as the "Organization") and
 [Community Partner's Name] _____
 (hereafter referred to as "Community Partner").

Purpose:

The purpose of this agreement is to outline the mutual expectations of the partnership and how the Organization and the Community Partner will work together. Both parties agree to collaborate based on the principles of mutual respect, transparency and shared goals.

Shared Goals:

Include a brief description explaining why the Organization and Community Partner are coming together and what each partner hopes to achieve.

What Community Partners Can Expect From the Organization:

- **Clear Communication:** Regular updates and open channels for feedback. A designated point of contact within the Organization.
- **Support and Resources:** Guidance and assistance in project planning and implementation. Access to relevant tools, training and resources.
- **Collaboration and Inclusivity:** Opportunities for joint decision making and participation in relevant meetings. An inclusive environment that values the input and perspectives of all partners. An active commitment to equity and inclusion, and a mutual willingness to grow in understanding.
- **Recognition and Visibility:** Attribution of the Community Partner's contributions in publications, events and media. Opportunities to co-brand and share success stories.
- **Accountability and Transparency:** Transparent reporting on the progress and outcomes of collaborative efforts. Honesty and integrity in all interactions.

What the Organization Can Expect From Community Partners:

- **Engagement and Commitment:** Active participation in meetings, events and collaborative activities. Compliance with agreed-upon timelines, deliverables and responsibilities.

- **Clear communication:** Regular updates and responsiveness to requests and inquiries. A designated point of contact to represent the Community Partner.
- **Resource Sharing:** Contribution of relevant resources, knowledge, data and expertise that can enhance collaborative efforts.
- **Feedback:** Constructive feedback to improve collaboration and project outcomes.
- **Promotion and Advocacy:** Promotion of shared initiatives and projects within their networks. Advocacy for the partnership’s goals and objectives in the broader community.

Reimbursement and Stipends:

Outline the stipends and reimbursements that will be paid to the Community Partner. If the Community Partner will contribute or receive something in-kind, also note that here.



Additional Terms:

- Acting in partnership and collaboration need not imply support for any specific policy position or program plan at the Organization – only a willingness to participate in the discussion.
- Either partner may leave the coalition at their discretion. The terminating party shall provide written notice explaining their reasoning, to help the other take necessary steps to improve operations, rethink strategies or adjust goals.

Organization name

Name, title of signer

| | |
|--|--|
| | |
|--|--|

Signature

Date

Community Partner name

Name, title of signer

| | |
|--|--|
| | |
|--|--|

Signature

Date

Activity 2.2: Community Partner Cultivation

Toolkit 2: Build an Inclusive Coalition

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Suggested citation:

American Forests. "Activity 2.2: Community Partner Cultivation."

Tree Equity Handbook Toolkit 2: Build an Inclusive Coalition.

Version 1. 2024. Washington, DC: American Forests.

<https://treeequityhandbook.org/tree-equity-handbook/build-an-inclusive-coalition/#activity-community-partner-cultivation>



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