



Tree Equity Handbook

A Practical Guide to Closing the Canopy Gap Between Neighborhoods

ACTIVITY 3.1

→ Community Engagement Plan

Toolkit 3: Coalition Action Planning

Issued November 2025



Activity 3.1: Community Engagement Plan

Toolkit 3 Overview:

Coalition Action Planning

Achieving Tree Equity is a crucial — and enormous — undertaking. By diligently engaging community voices to build a unified strategy, your coalition can move confidently toward its goals, one step at a time.

Begin with community engagement planning to ensure all perspectives are thoughtfully included from the start. Next, conduct a comprehensive Tree Equity Needs Assessment to evaluate the state of the urban forest, assess current approaches to equity and community engagement, and review existing activities and policies. With that groundwork laid, you can formulate a Coalition Action Plan that operationalizes your goals and reflects the community's needs, priorities and contributions.

Activity Map

Community
Engagement Plan

→ [Community Insights](#)

→ [Tree Equity Needs
Assessment](#)

→ [Coalition Action Plan](#)

Community Engagement Plan



Overview & Basic Steps

Develop a community engagement plan to mobilize stakeholders, foster collaboration and ensure meaningful participation. This exercise will help you and your collaborators tailor community engagement activities to their intended audiences, understand logistics and define desired outcomes.

Before starting this activity, you might need:

- A Stakeholder Inventory and Map → [Toolkit 2.1](#)
- A Coalition Roadmap → [Toolkit 2.5](#)

Suggested Time: 2–3 weeks

Level of Difficulty: Challenging

Participants: 2–4 individuals passionate about outreach and relationship building; review and approval by core coalition team

Instructions

- 1** Complete the “Plan Overview” section of your **Community Engagement Plan Worksheet** ([page 5](#)) to set a clear directive for your plan.
- 2** Continuing in the Community Engagement Plan Worksheet, use the “Activity Timeline” section to draw up a schedule of activities. Based on your understanding of the current landscape of stakeholders and collaborators, decide an appropriate level of engagement for each key group.
- 3** Use the “Activity Template” — the final section of the worksheet — to plan individual activities in more detail. Complete one plan per activity, making sure each one aligns with the values and strategies you outlined in the “Plan Overview” section.
- 4** Share these worksheets with the coalition core team for review. The finalized Community Engagement Plan can serve as a guiding document that helps your audiences understand how to participate in your initiative and how their voices and feedback will be integrated.

After you complete this activity:

- Use engagement activities to collect community insights. → [Activity 3.2](#)
- Conduct a Tree Equity needs assessment. → [Activity 3.3](#)

TOOLKIT 3: Community Engagement Plan | Activity 1 – WORKSHEET

Assess Readiness for Collaboration



As you begin community engagement planning in earnest, you will need to gain an understanding of existing dynamics. You may have to do some intentional relationship building as key steps in your engagement planning.

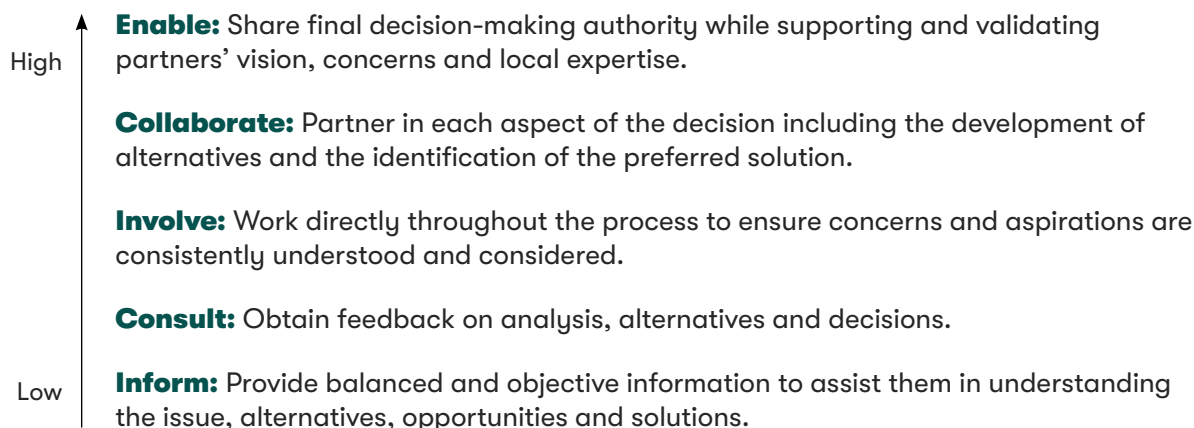
- **Who are the groups already doing Tree Equity work or related work in your community?** What are their values and how do they align with your own? How will you integrate those values into the work?
- **Who is missing?** Look at existing relationships and spaces where the work is already happening to see if any communities or groups are not included. If so, why? How will you accommodate these groups to address the gap?
- **What is the power dynamic?** Consider the balance of power and influence between individuals and groups. Who has the most influence over decision making?
- **Are there barriers to partnership?** Past experiences or collaborations may affect people’s ability to trust your initiative or to work with other stakeholders. What can you learn from existing dynamics, and how can you address people’s reservations and concerns to encourage understanding?
- **Are there barriers to participation?** Will you need to provide support services such as child care, transportation, meals or stipends to ensure a diverse group of people can participate? Are there language or cultural barriers that you will need to plan for? What is the best venue? At what time of day should events be scheduled?

Tips for Strategic Engagement

- Plan with people, not for people.
- Respect residents’ autonomy, local knowledge and authority.
- Adapt to residents’ schedules, language and culture.
- Collaborate with stakeholders to set the agenda and assess progress.
- Communicate early and often.
- Be transparent and accountable.
- Acknowledge benefits and costs.

Consider Levels of Engagement

Consult your **Stakeholder Map Worksheet** ([Toolkit 2](#)) to set the appropriate level of engagement with different stakeholders based on their levels of influence and interest. Typically, the higher the interest and influence, the deeper your level of engagement should be.



Community Engagement Plan Worksheet

Use the next three pages to craft your community engagement plan. Start with an overview that defines your guiding values, sets long-term goals and outlines key strategies. Then brainstorm potential activities that address coalition priorities and respond to the needs of your target audiences. Finally, you can begin to plan individual activities that bring stakeholders together in pursuit of a common Tree Equity goal.

Plan Overview

Set a clear directive for your plan.



Initiative Name

Initiative Description

Guiding Principles or Values

These are broad ideas such as transparency, adaptability, equity, inclusivity, authenticity, honesty, respect, accessibility, continuous improvement, collaborative problem-solving, and proactive communication. These might be drawn from a mission statement or other existing document.

Long-Term Goals

What do you intend to achieve in the long run? How will community engagement and outreach help you succeed?

Key Strategies

What are the key elements your strategy will target? Examples: expanding access, addressing barriers, building partnerships, relationship building, active listening, collaborative planning, capacity building, inclusive processes and events, feedback and evaluation mechanisms, celebration and recognition.

Activity Timeline

As you draw up your activity timeline, consider the preferences and accessibility needs of each target audience. Use your **Stakeholder Map Worksheet** and **Coalition Roadmap Worksheet** (see [Toolkit 2](#)) as guides to address top priorities and design activities that maximize meaningful engagement with your target audiences.

See “Engagement and Outreach Strategies” on [page 11](#) for activity ideas

Target Audience	Activity Description	Roadmap Priority Addressed?	Timeline



Activity Timeline (Continued)

Target Audience	Activity Description	Roadmap Priority Addressed?	Timeline



Activity Template

Plan proactively! Define goals, understand logistics and consider how to tailor each activity to the target audience based on their needs and preferences. *Fill out one per activity.*



Activity	Responsible Parties	Timeline
Description		
Target Audience	Engagement Outcomes <i>What will the engagement result in? How will this activity contribute to the broader objectives of this plan?</i>	
Outputs <i>Your measurable products, activities and deliverables, e.g., meetings held, number of participants engaged, materials distributed, events organized, partnerships formed.</i>		
Level of Engagement <i>At what level do you hope to engage with this group?</i>		
<input type="checkbox"/> Enable (high) <input type="checkbox"/> Collaborate <input type="checkbox"/> Involve <input type="checkbox"/> Consult <input type="checkbox"/> Inform (low)		
Roadmap Priority Addressed		

Activity Template (Continued)



Key Messages Out

What information or ideas do you want to communicate? How can you frame these messages to resonate with your target audience? Consider their priorities and interests, as well as common ground you both share.

Strategies for Incorporating Input

What methods and plans will be used to gather input? How will the input be considered and integrated into decision making?

Logistics and Resources

What logistical considerations, equipment and materials do you need to get this done effectively? Consider the needs and preferences of your target audience and what will make it easier for them to participate.

Outreach

Identify communication channels and tactics for maximizing participation.

Sample Activity Template

Activity

Community Tree Inventory and Mapping

Responsible Parties

Urban Sustainability Division
Green Guardians Coalition

Timeline

2028

Description

Engage Arborvale residents in collecting valuable data on urban trees, raise awareness of tree-related issues, and inform strategic planning and decision making for future tree planting and maintenance initiatives. Mapping efforts will target the Woodlawn, Oakley and Oldesville neighborhoods.

Target Audience

Residents with an interest in environmental science, data collection and community mapping, as well as local schools, youth groups and civic organizations.

Engagement Outcomes

- Increased community involvement in urban forestry data collection
- Community capacity building – building skills and knowledge in the community
- Creation of a street tree inventory and map
- Community identification of areas in need of additional tree planting and maintenance efforts

Outputs

- An online platform created for data input and visualization
- 3 in-person training sessions, 20 participants each
- Public data collection schedule
- 10 community-led data collection days

Level of Engagement

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

Enable (high)
 Collaborate
 Involve
 Consult
 Inform (low)



Key Messages Out

- Healthy trees, healthy community.
- It takes a village to improve and maintain our green spaces.
- Your participation helps our community plan for the future.

Strategies for Incorporating Input

- Participants' direct observations will inform planning
- Volunteer coordinators will serve as point people to make note of general observations and concerns from participants that come up over the course of the process

Logistics and Resources

- Training materials on tree identification and data collection
- Mapping software or apps, GIS staff person
- Volunteer coordinators to oversee data collection efforts
- Outreach materials to promote participation

Outreach

- Create Facebook group, regular postings on upcoming events, volunteer videos
- Partner with local high school science teachers and faith groups to volunteer and learn
- Post on neighborhood association forums and attend meetings to recruit residents

Roadmap Priority Addressed

Establish baseline tree canopy and track change over time.

TOOLKIT 3: Community Engagement Plan | SUPPLEMENTARY RESOURCE

Engagement and Outreach Strategies

Now the hard work begins!

Start implementing your engagement plan with confidence that each planned activity is advancing your goals. We've provided a list of potential activities below to help you generate ideas. Don't forget to publish your engagement plan and share outcomes from each activity to maintain transparency with your stakeholders.

Use *Tree Equity Score* to plan activities in neighborhoods with the greatest need. →

www.TreeEquityScore.org

→ Plan

Planning Workshop: Provide a structured environment for key stakeholders to collaborate on planning for Tree Equity initiatives. Workshops typically involve activities such as brainstorming, goal setting and action planning.

Community Advisory Board: Establish a formal community advisory board made of community members, local organizations, various government agencies and other stakeholders to provide input, guidance and oversight for Tree Equity initiatives.

Local Task Force: Convene a small task force of community members, stakeholders and experts to address specific challenges or opportunities identified by the coalition. Task force members collaborate closely with local entities and other stakeholders to find solutions and activate resources.

→ Collect Data

Tree Inventory and Mapping Workshops: Conduct workshops to train community members in tree inventory and mapping techniques. Use Tree Equity Score to introduce the concepts of inequitable tree canopy distribution and identify priority neighborhoods in need of inventory.

Community-Based Research Projects: Engage community members in participatory research projects focused on urban forestry and Tree Equity. Collaborate with academic institutions or research organizations to conduct studies that address community-identified needs and priorities.

Community Interviews, Community Meetings, Surveys and Focus Groups: Local knowledge is data. Gather input from community members on their perceptions, priorities and needs related to urban forestry and Tree Equity.

→ Educate and Inform

Door-to-Door Canvassing: Knock on doors to invite residents to upcoming events, gather input and garner support for local initiatives. If no one answers the door, leave a printed flier with a QR code to scan for more information or to submit inquiries.

Neighborhood Tree Walks: Organize guided tree walks or tours led by local experts that highlight the value of urban trees and allow participants to observe firsthand the disparities in tree cover captured by Tree Equity Score.

School Outreach Programs: Partner with local schools to incorporate urban forestry and Tree Equity education into the curriculum. Offer interactive workshops, field trips, and hands-on activities to engage students in environmental stewardship and introduce them to a diverse range of career opportunities.

Event Tabling: Host booths or tables at community events such as fairs, festivals or markets to boost your visibility and interact directly with community members. Use the booth space to distribute informational materials, engage in conversations, provide interaction with Tree Equity Score through a tablet or touchscreen and invite attendees to sign up for newsletters or volunteer opportunities.



➔ Amplify

Grassroots Advocacy Training: Equip community members with tools to advocate for Tree Equity in their neighborhoods. This will help build grassroots support and equip residents to participate in Tree Equity efforts.

Media and Digital Campaigns: Use local publications, local radio and television channels and social media platforms to share educational content, success stories and upcoming events related to Tree Equity. Develop multilingual outreach materials and campaigns to reach all segments of the community, including non-English-speaking residents.

Public Art Installations: Develop public art installations that reflect local voices and focus on Tree Equity themes to raise awareness and spark conversations about the importance of trees in urban environments.

➔ Plant and Protect Trees

Tree Planting Events: Coordinate community tree planting events to actively involve residents in greening initiatives. Encourage participation from diverse community groups and provide training on proper tree planting techniques.

Tree Adoption Programs: Establish tree adoption programs where community members can adopt and care for trees in public spaces or their neighborhoods. Provide training and resources to ensure proper tree maintenance, and consider using “tree tags” with QR codes that direct people to learn more.

Tree Care and Pruning Workshops: Provide training sessions on tree care and pruning. Equip participants with the skills to become active stewards of smaller trees on their property and connect them with arborists for larger tree maintenance.

Tree Giveaway Events: Organize tree giveaway events for priority neighborhoods where residents can receive free saplings or seedlings to plant on their properties. Provide information on tree care and maintenance to ensure successful establishment.

Community Engagement Resources

If you're interested in learning more about strategies and tools that can inform how you approach community engagement, we've provided some helpful resources below.

Community Action Guide (Vibrant Cities Lab)

A grassroots guide to building a community-driven process to advance Tree Equity.

The Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership (Movement Strategy Center)

A toolkit to help leaders assess and strengthen their community engagement efforts, particularly for historically marginalized groups, to advance community-driven solutions.

Spectrum of Processes for Collaboration and Consensus-Building in Public Decisions

A quick reference to selecting collaborative process tools that are targeted to the level of engagement appropriate for your target audiences. Developed by Suzanne G. Orenstein, Susan Sherry and Lucy Moore (2008).

Public Engagement Reference Guide for Forest Service Employees (USDA)

A community engagement guide developed for public service foresters.

100 Great Community Engagement Ideas (MetroQuest)

Tips and tricks to help planners create transparent, welcoming, and effective public participation programs.

Tree Equity Curriculum (American Forests)

The Tree Equity Curriculum: Exploring Green STEAM Careers is a modular curriculum intended to engage high school students (9th-12th grade).

Philadelphia, PA, Lexington, KY, Arlington, VA, Los Angeles, CA and Oakland, CA (Case Studies)

See how community engagement has worked in several cities.



Planting at Sampson-Webber Leadership Academy with Greening of Detroit and Detroit Tree Equity Partnership in Detroit, Michigan.

Activity 3.1: Community Engagement Plan

Toolkit 3: Coalition Action Planning

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