



Tree Equity Handbook

A Practical Guide to Closing the Canopy Gap Between Neighborhoods

ACTIVITY 3.3

→ Tree Equity Needs Assessment

Toolkit 3: Coalition Action Planning

Issued November 2025





Activity Map

→ [Community Engagement Plan](#)

→ [Community Insights](#)

Tree Equity Needs Assessment

→ [Coalition Action Plan](#)

Activity 3.3: Tree Equity Needs Assessment

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.

Tree Equity Needs Assessment



Overview & Basic Steps

Follow a set of simple guiding questions to conduct a Tree Equity Needs Assessment for your city or region. This exercise will give you a more detailed understanding of existing urban forestry activities, local policies, avenues of community engagement and the state of the urban forest in your community. It will also help lay the groundwork for more informed planning in the future.

Any entity or sector focused on advancing Tree Equity can lead this holistic assessment, but we recommend that they work with a diverse team of stakeholders who can contribute a wide range of knowledge and community connections.

Suggested Time: 2–3 weeks

Level of Difficulty: Moderate

Participants: 2–4 individuals with diverse networks and expertise; review and approval by core coalition team

Before starting this activity, you might need:

- Baseline data from Tree Equity Score → [Activity 1.1](#)

Instructions

- 1 Use the **Tree Equity Needs Assessment Worksheet** ([page 6](#)) to evaluate the status of existing programs and conditions in your community.
- 2 Based on your findings, use the same worksheet to identify actionable needs that your coalition can address.
- 3 Share findings and suggestions with your coalition core team to refine and update as needed.

After you complete this activity:

- Use the results of the Tree Equity Needs Assessment to inform the development of your Coalition Action Plan. → [Activity 3.4](#)

TOOLKIT 3: Tree Equity Needs Assessment | Activity 3 – WORKSHEET

Tips for Articulating Gaps and Needs



This **Tree Equity Needs Assessment Worksheet** ([page 6](#)) is designed to help you document actionable recommendations that will inform future planning and strategy. For this reason, you should strive to be as precise and targeted as possible when identifying gaps or needs.

Here are some examples of precise needs — and an imprecise need — that could be cited in response to the question, “How well developed is coordination of urban forestry management across sectors?”

Precise needs:

- “Increase cross-departmental coordination of city urban forestry activities.”
- “Create centralized reporting for tree care, planting and removal.”
- “Improvement needed in maintenance scheduling, resource allocation and tree health tracking.”

Imprecise need:

- “Improve collaboration.”

When considering gaps and needs, ask yourself:

- What’s the missing link?
- What processes, systems or information is lacking?
- What obstacles are preventing progress?
- Where are the discrepancies between our goals and our current state?
- If we had \$100,000, what would we do with it?

While budget and staffing limitations shouldn’t stop you from making recommendations, consider what can realistically be addressed within the timeline of your initiative.

Sample Needs Assessment

Indicator Question	Status	Describe Gaps/Needs
How much street tree data (e.g., on location, care, species, and health) are available to support management of the urban forest?	Partially Complete. The urban forest inventory is up-to-date for major parks and green spaces only.	Need comprehensive data for street trees and smaller community areas.
How strong is community support for tree protection and planting?	Underdeveloped. Limited awareness of both the benefits of trees and opportunities for involvement.	Increase public education initiatives. Develop community engagement strategy.
How equitably distributed is tree cover in your community?	Not equitable. Low-income areas have fewer green spaces and less tree canopy cover.	Need strategic approach to planting and resource allocation to ensure equitable distribution of urban forest benefits.

Tree Equity Needs Assessment Worksheet

You will work through a series of guiding questions to evaluate (1) Urban Forestry Activities, (2) Plans and Policies, (3) Tree Equity Initiatives, (4) Community Engagement and (5) the State of the Urban Forest.

Begin by assessing the **status** of existing programs and conditions, noting whether an indicator is well established, is in progress, needs development, is inequitable, or another status relevant to the indicator question. Then **describe gaps or needs** that your coalition can address; be precise and targeted in your recommendations.

Turn to your partners to fill gaps in knowledge as you conduct this assessment — ideally people who have different information, networks or viewpoints.

Once you've completed the worksheet, share the results with your coalition core team and with the broader community for continued transparency. You can use the Tree Equity Needs Assessment as a foundational document to establish a shared understanding of current needs and provide a set of recommendations that will inform planning efforts.

Sample on previous page

See next page for the fillable worksheet



A brainstorming activity at the 2022 1t.org US Chapter Summit in Washington, D.C.

URBAN FORESTRY ACTIVITIES		
Indicator Question	Status	Describe Gaps/Needs
How well developed is coordination of urban forestry management across sectors?	Underdeveloped. Most management activities are occurring with little to no coordination between entities.	Create centralized reporting for tree care, planting and removal.
How well developed is coordination of urban forestry management across sectors?		
How clearly defined are the responsibilities of entities involved in managing urban forests?		
How well are current urban forestry staff roles able to meet urban forestry needs?		
At current levels of city staffing and funding dedicated to urban forestry, how reactive or proactive is planting and tree care?		
How sustainable is the funding model for urban forestry work?		
Under current budgets, how much of the necessary urban forestry work can be accomplished?		



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URBAN FORESTRY ACTIVITIES



Indicator Question	Status	Describe Gaps/Needs
How effective are monitoring and maintenance activities for public trees?		
How effective are urban forestry efforts on public lands?		
How effective are urban forestry efforts on private lands?		
How much street tree data (e.g., location, care, species, health) is available to support management of the urban forest?		
How complete or up to date is data on the whole urban forest?		
How active are facilities to process wood waste and convert it to higher-value products, if any?		
What level of political appetite is there for supporting and expanding urban forestry activities?		

PLANS AND POLICIES		
Indicator Question	Status	Describe Gaps/Needs
To what degree are trees considered critical urban infrastructure by local leaders and policymakers?	Increasingly. The level of acknowledgment varies but this framing has gained momentum in the past few years.	Develop policies that explicitly recognize trees as essential urban infrastructure, and integrate policies into city planning, budgeting, and maintenance strategies.
To what degree are trees considered critical urban infrastructure by local leaders and policymakers?		
Does your community have existing tree-related goals and, if so, how effective have those goals been in achieving desired outcomes?		
Does your community have a written urban forest management plan and, if so, how effective is it?		
How effective are other local plans, policies and programs for supporting tree retention, planting or replacement?		
How effective are systems, policies or ordinances for protecting trees from removal?		



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PLANS AND POLICIES



Indicator Question	Status	Describe Gaps/Needs
<p>How specific are ordinances or policies about the number of trees or level of tree canopy that must be retained or planted on individual parcels?</p>		
<p>How effectively are these systems, policies or ordinances enforced?</p>		
<p>How rigorous is guidance for tree selection, such as preference for natives, lists of suitable trees, etc.</p>		
<p>How rigorous is guidance on tree removal, such as bans or requirements related to noxious trees or invasives?</p>		
<p>How coordinated are local tree-related activities with municipal activities?</p>		
<p>To what extent are utilities required to follow arboricultural best practices when managing vegetation around powerlines?</p>		

TREE EQUITY INITIATIVES		
Indicator Question	Status	Describe Gaps/Needs
How strong is trust in city or regional processes among different groups within the community?	Variable—Needs Work. Pockets of both strong confidence among vocal residents as well as deep mistrust—especially underserved communities.	Need more equitable representation in decision making and greater transparency and inclusivity in these processes.
How strong is trust in city or regional processes among different groups within the community?		
How inclusive is the decision-making and planning process for tree-related initiatives?		
How well are the benefits of current urban forestry programs distributed across all residents?		
What level of awareness about Tree Equity is there among entities responsible for managing the urban forest?		
What active strategies are being considered or are already in place to improve Tree Equity and how well supported are these strategies?		



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TREE EQUITY INITIATIVES



Indicator Question	Status	Describe Gaps/Needs
How much is the concept of Tree Equity integrated into formalized plans, frameworks or policies?		
Are there any barriers to success for advancing a Tree Equity approach and, if so, how significant are these obstacles?		
What level of political or institutional appetite is there for advancing Tree Equity?		

A teen Urban Tree Corps member shows Boston City Councilor Anissa Essaibi George the process for recording tree inventory data.



David Meshoulam / Speak for the Trees Boston

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT		
Indicator Question	Status	Describe Gaps/Needs
What engagement policies are in place for tree-related decision making, and how effective are they for ensuring broad participation?	Moderately Effective. Policies require involvement of a wide range of stakeholders; however, the effectiveness is mixed. Some groups are actively engaged, and others have limited to no involvement.	Need greater oversight of policy implementation to enhance outreach to underrepresented groups.
What engagement policies are in place for tree-related decision making, and how effective are they for ensuring broad participation?		
How involved are residents and community groups in planning and implementing urban forest activities?		
How actively are residents and community groups engaged in seeking opportunities to support the urban forest?		
How strong is community support for tree protection and planting?		
How strong is the level of stakeholder concern that could hinder tree-related efforts?		
What urban forestry career education and workforce development opportunities are available?		



STATE OF THE URBAN FOREST



Indicator Question	Status	Describe Gaps/Needs
What is the canopy cover (%) overall?	Moderate Declines. There have been some localized increases in tree planting and conservation efforts; however, these gains have not fully offset the broader trends of development and urban expansion.	Stronger policies and regulations to protect tree cover and manage land use, including stricter zoning laws, conservation incentives, and integration into planning and development processes.
What is the canopy cover (%) overall? (See Tree Equity Score and Toolkit 1.)		
How equitably distributed is tree cover in your community? (See Tree Equity Score and Toolkit 1.)		
Has tree cover declined, increased or remained steady overall?		
Are losses and gains occurring in specific areas or neighborhoods?		
Is the majority of tree canopy located on public or private lands?		

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STATE OF THE URBAN FOREST		
Indicator Question	Status	Describe Gaps/Needs
To what extent is there potential to expand tree cover and maintenance on public land?		
To what extent is there potential to expand tree cover and maintenance on private land?		
How does local sentiment view the impact of the urban forest on quality of life and well-being — positively or negatively?		
How does local sentiment view the impact of the urban forest on public health — positively or negatively?		
How does local sentiment view the impact of the urban forest on climate resilience and environmental health — positively or negatively?		
What are the most significant threats to urban forest health and resilience?		

Activity 3.3: Tree Equity Needs Assessment

Toolkit 3: Coalition Action Planning

Written by:

Julia Twichell

Contributions by:

Ian Leahy

Jake Simon

Larry Wiseman

Reviewed by:

Alexis Gomez

Joshua Simon

Jesiqua Hutchinson

Jenni Shockling

Tanner Haid

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