



# Tree Equity Handbook

## A Practical Guide to Closing the Canopy Gap Between Neighborhoods

ACTIVITY 4.3

### → Policy Advocacy Guide

Toolkit 4: Create Plans and Policies

Issued November 2025



## Activity 4.3: Policy Advocacy Guide

Toolkit 4

### Create Plans and Policies

You've collected data, built a coalition, and gathered community input to develop an action plan. Now it's time to begin pulling on the levers of power to create real, measurable change through local policy.

Start by taking a comprehensive inventory of the existing policies, plans and codes that affect trees in your city. Identify what is working and where there are opportunities for improvement. Then begin to craft new policy priorities, assessing your initiatives for potential impacts to the community. Finally, take stock of the strengths that you and your team members bring to the initiative and decide how you will put those skills to work.

### Activity Map

→ Policy Inventory  
and Gap Analysis

→ Policy Impact  
Assessment

**Policy Advocacy  
Guide**

# Policy Advocacy Guide



## Overview & Basic Steps

Urban forestry is in a time of rapid transformation. Achieving Tree Equity requires letting go of old paradigms, embracing change and empowering leaders to activate sustained movements. This is where you come in. Use our provided framework to evaluate the strengths that you and your team members bring to your initiative, then visualize how you can put those strengths into play. This exercise should give you a clearer sense of just how your coalition can build power — and help you believe that change is achievable.

**Suggested Time:** 1 day

**Level of Difficulty:** Low

**Participants:** 2–4 individuals who are willing and able to help steer change in their community

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### Before starting this activity, you might need:

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

### Instructions

- 1 Read about the key players in change-making and transformation.
- 2 Identify your specialty.
- 3 Use the **Advocacy Team Map** ([page 6](#)) to build your team and consider your team's strengths.
- 4 Apply you and your team's strengths to advance policy changes through advocacy.

# Urban Forestry and Transformative Leadership for Tree Equity



Whether your community’s tree canopy is thriving or shrinking, change is inevitable. Shifts in climate, development pressures and demographic changes reshape our communities and landscapes alike. We plan for trees; we must also plan for people. This is where strong leadership can bring transformative results to your community.

You may be wondering what role you will play in this transformation. Can you use your position to change the status quo? Do you have specialized knowledge that will inform policy? You will reflect on that role throughout this activity to discover how each of us can better serve the public and, together, grow something greater than the sum of its parts.

## A Framework for Transformation

In *The Tipping Point*, Malcolm Gladwell shows how small, strategic actions can spark large-scale change. He outlines “The Law of the Few,” asserting that leadership depends on having the right people in the right roles.

Gladwell identifies three key change agents:

- **Connectors** — relationship builders
- **Experts** — knowledge sharers
- **Persuaders** — motivators and storytellers

In the context of policy advocacy, these roles become powerful tools for change.

## What Kind of Change Agent Are You?

Use the following sections to identify which role(s) you most align with.

### Are You a Connector?

Answer “yes” or “no” to each:

- I know a lot of people in my field and beyond.
- I enjoy meeting new people and going to events.
- I tend to remember names and faces.
- I often introduce people to each other.
- I maintain relationships across sectors.

**If you answered mostly “yes”:** You’re a *Connector*. You build bridges between people, disciplines and institutions — an essential role in aligning Tree Equity efforts with broader community goals.

### Are You an Expert?

Answer “yes” or “no”:

- I love learning and staying up to date on new ideas.
- I often research products or trends before others.
- I enjoy sharing useful information with others.
- I trust data and research to guide decisions.
- People come to me for advice or insights.

**If you answered mostly “yes”:** You’re an *Expert*. You are a resource of trusted knowledge — crucial for driving evidence-based change and building credibility in the field.

### Are You a Persuader?

Answer “yes” or “no”:

- I’m often animated or passionate when I speak.
- I enjoy telling stories and capturing attention.
- I’m good at inspiring others to take action.
- I don’t shy away from leadership roles.
- People listen to me and are moved by what I say.

**If you answered mostly “yes”:** You’re a *Persuader*. You can elevate Tree Equity by compelling others to care — and act.

Tom Koenig / American Forests



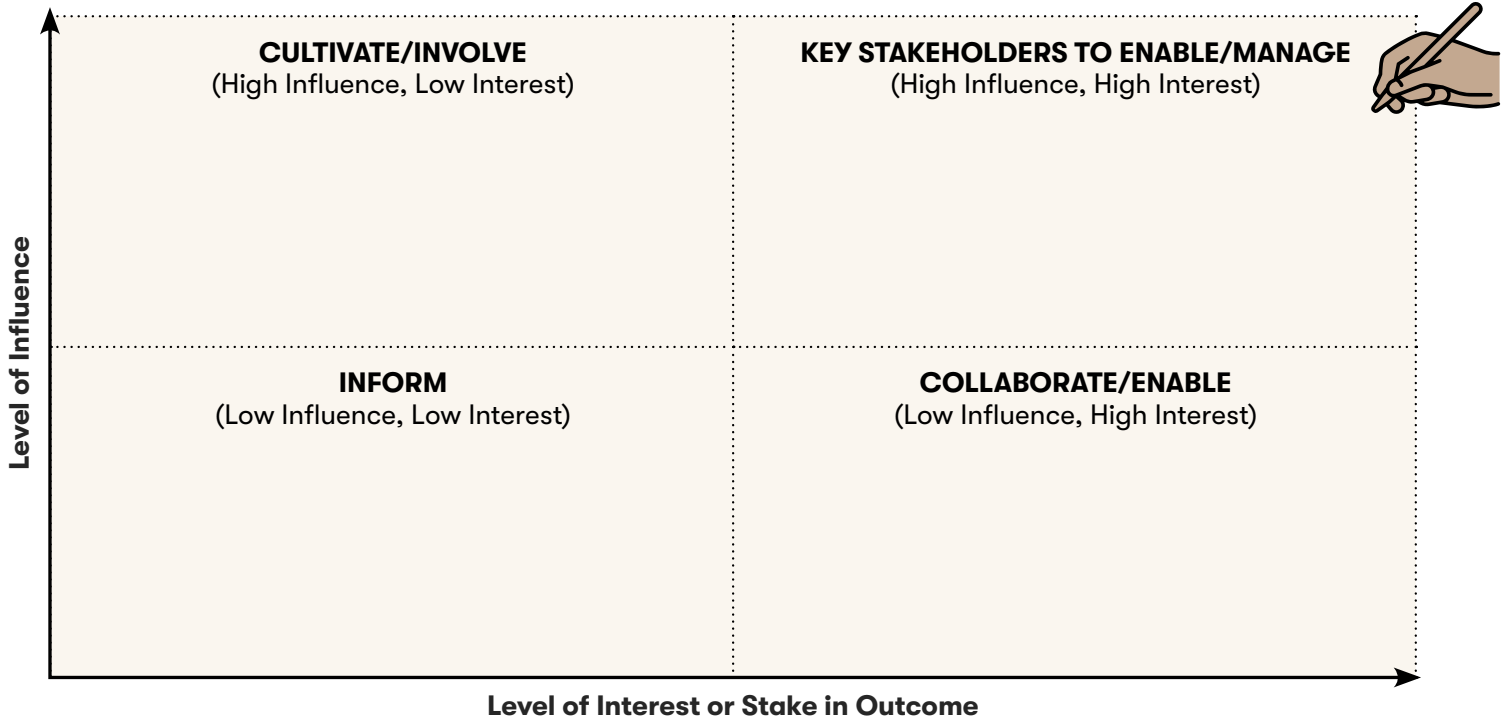
Trees for Houston, Google, and American Forests host a tree planting event at Shadydale Elementary to celebrate the launch of the Houston Tree Equity Score Analyzer (TESA). Rep. Thompson joins volunteers for a day of tree planting.

**TOOLKIT 4: Create Tree Equity Plans and Policies | Activity 3 – WORKSHEET**

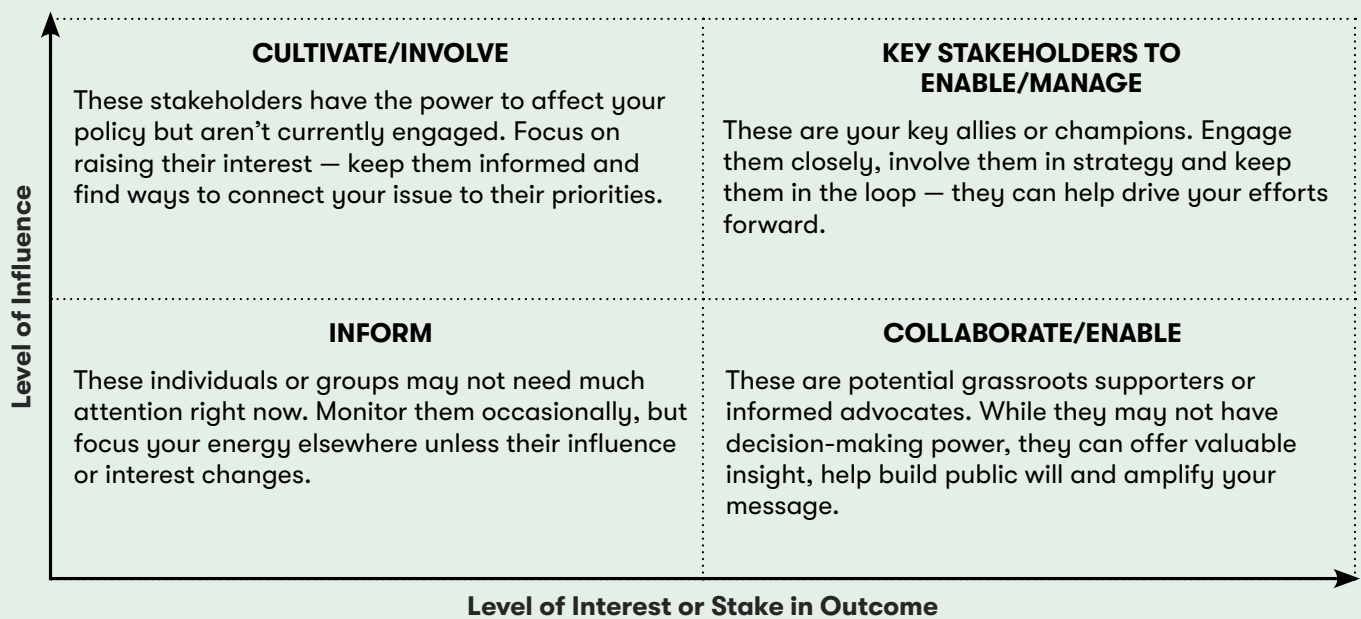
## Advocacy Team Map Worksheet

Now, look back to your Stakeholder Map ([Activity 2.1](#)) and identify partners you think will be most influential and interested in helping advocate for policy action. Place those partners in the Advocacy Team Map below.

### Advocacy Team Map



### How to interpret your Advocacy Team Map:



# Applying Your Advocacy Team’s Roles to Policy Advocacy

Each type of leader and their teams can support policy changes in their communities in different ways.

**Connectors** can:

- Build alliances across departments, sectors and communities
- Break down silos to integrate the intended results into broader planning and other policies

**Experts** can:

- Interpret data and map the expected results to tell a clear, compelling story about proposed policy improvements
- Provide sound science and best practices for decision-makers considering changes

**Persuaders** can:

- Advocate for marginalized voices who may benefit or otherwise be impacted by the policy
- Tell stories to community members and the media that build the public support and political will needed to move new ideas forward

No matter your role, these elements work best together. A full team includes all three — and values what each contributes.

Next, organize partners on your new advocacy team. Who can help build out a leadership team that advances effective policy? Who is best suited to serve which roles? List them below with their strength(s).

## Advocacy Team

Connectors	Experts	Persuaders



**Advocacy Team Check-In**

Ask yourself and your advocacy team:

- Does your team include Connectors, Experts and Persuaders?
- Are other partners helping carry these roles?
- Can you or someone on the team grow into a role that’s missing?
- Can you recruit to fill gaps?

# Policy Advocacy in Action

Now that your team is in place, it's time to take action. Effective policy advocacy involves activation through many different channels. Your team can divide responsibilities based on each member's strengths.

## 1 Community Outreach & Education

- **Host town halls, workshops and public forums** to explain the policy's goals and benefits.
- **Distribute educational materials** (flyers, infographics, videos) both online and in person.
- **Engage schools, universities and community organizations** to raise awareness.

## 2 Stakeholder Engagement

- **Identify and meet with key stakeholders**, including local businesses, neighborhood associations and environmental groups.
- **Build diverse partnerships** to broaden the coalition's base of support.
- **Address concerns directly** to build trust and reduce opposition.

## 3 Lobbying Local Officials

- **Request meetings with city council members, the mayor or county supervisors** to present data and constituent support.
- **Coordinate letter-writing campaigns, petitions and phone calls** to demonstrate public interest.
- **Provide policy briefs and talking points** to officials and their staff.

## 4 Media & Communications

- **Write op-eds and letters to the editor** in local newspapers.
- **Use social media campaigns** to reach broader audiences and mobilize support.
- **Engage local radio, TV and podcasts** for interviews or public service announcements.

## 5 Organizing Public Support

- **Hold rallies, marches or visibility events** to show the volume of community backing.
- **Gather petition signatures** (paper or digital) to deliver to decision-makers.
- **Encourage public testimony** at city council or planning commission meetings.

## 6 Data & Research

- **Conduct local impact studies** or compile existing research showing the benefits of the policy.
- **Share case studies** from other cities or regions with similar successful policies.
- **Track public opinion** through surveys or polls to guide strategy.

## 7 Coalition Building

- **Align with organizations that bring unique skills or constituencies** (e.g., health, labor, youth groups).
- **Create a shared platform or policy agenda** with clear messaging.
- **Coordinate roles and responsibilities** to stay organized and strategic.

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## Final Reflection: Leading for Equity

Even if the specific categories of Connectors, Experts and Persuaders don't align perfectly with your experiences, this is a concept you can easily translate to other types of leadership. What's important to remember is that you will need many people, working together and combining their unique skills, to achieve your goals.

- **Is your team connected and collaborative?** Make introductions and form relationships that can unstick languishing policy change.
- **Is your team informed and data-driven?** Share the power of knowledge with decision-makers so they are compelled to act.
- **Is someone on your team inspiring others to take action?** Harness that inspirational energy and apply it to its greatest influence, be it policy advocacy or otherwise.

The path to Tree Equity is intersectional. Movements are sustained by diverse casts of characters who, whether by stepping up or by supporting others to lead, work together to advance new ideas and advocate for meaningful change. Trees can't stand alone, and neither can we.

Let's build something greater than the sum of its parts — and ensure everyone benefits from the power of trees.

### **Activity 4.3: Policy Advocacy Guide**

Toolkit 4: Create Plans and Policies

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