



# Tree Equity Handbook

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

ACTIVITY 5.2

### → Workforce Review

Toolkit 5:  
Develop a Workforce

Issued November 2025



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## Activity 5.2: Workforce Review

Toolkit 5

### Develop a Workforce

Urban forests depend on a skilled workforce to thrive. With an increasingly urgent need to close the Tree Equity gap, this moment offers an opportunity to recruit and train a new generation of urban forestry professionals who better reflect the communities where Tree Equity is most needed.

Start by building a network of workforce partners, then assess your community's workforce landscape to identify concrete actions your coalition can take to build awareness, train workers and cultivate a robust ecosystem of Tree Equity professionals.

# Workforce Review



## Overview & Basic Steps

Your Workforce Committee's first collaborative action should be to conduct a Workforce Review. This process provides a data-informed understanding of the current workforce landscape, highlighting where gaps exist and opportunities for growth.

By gathering input from multiple sectors, you will be able to design workforce initiatives that are responsive, equitable and targeted to the needs of your community. This review is not just a diagnostic tool; it is also a coalition-building activity. Conducting it collaboratively strengthens partnerships, deepens mutual understanding and ensures the voices of those most affected by Tree Equity and workforce challenges are heard.

**Suggested Time:** 2–4 weeks

**Level of Difficulty:** Challenging

**Participants:** Workforce Committee members and workforce development professionals

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

- A Workforce Committee representative of your workforce ecosystem → [Activity 5.1](#)
- Access to local labor market data (e.g., BLS or state workforce boards)
- Relevant local plans (e.g., climate action, resilience or green jobs strategies)

### Instructions

- 1 Define the scope of your Workforce Review — include geographic focus, sectors and time frame.
- 2 Collect workforce data and insights from training providers, employers and community partners to complete the **Workforce Review Worksheet** → [page 5](#)
- 3 Use your findings to identify strengths, gaps and actionable recommendations for workforce development.

### After you complete this activity:

- Organize your Workforce Committee to translate recommendations from your Workforce Review into actionable goals and strategies.
- Use your completed review to prioritize partnerships, training investments and wraparound supports.
- Begin planning actions to add or scale up workforce initiatives. → [Activity 5.3](#)

## How can a workforce review help?

Urban forestry workforce development faces several ongoing unique challenges:

- Limited public awareness of career pathways
- Shortage of trained and certified workers
- Unequal access to training and employment opportunities, especially in underserved neighborhoods
- Barriers to employment for returning citizens, including lack of certifications, limited employer awareness or stigma around justice involvement
- Rapidly evolving climate and infrastructure demands

A Workforce Review helps create a clear, data-informed picture of your community's workforce capacity, readiness and barriers. Engage partners and gather relevant workforce data by inviting representatives from your Workforce Committee and partner organizations to share information, insights and datasets. Use both quantitative data (e.g., job openings, wages, training completions) and qualitative data (e.g., interviews, focus groups, and community feedback). This understanding allows you to design realistic, scalable and equity-centered solutions that meet both environmental and social needs.

## What does a workforce review entail?

- 1. Assess current conditions:** Understand workforce size, skill levels, demographics, existing training programs, recruitment pipelines and available funding.
- 2. Identify gaps & needs:** Pinpoint the missing systems, underdeveloped areas or barriers preventing progress.
- 3. Gather diverse perspectives:** Include voices from employers, educators, service providers and residents with lived experience.
- 4. Engage reentry service providers:** Include probation/parole agencies and organizations supporting returning citizens to understand workforce readiness barriers and opportunities for collaboration.
- 5. Document actionable priorities:** Develop focused recommendations to guide your workforce strategy and inform decision-making.

## Tips for success

- Include voices from underrepresented communities to ensure that reviews reflect diverse perspectives.
- Use both quantitative data (e.g., job posting trends, training enrollment, canopy analysis) and qualitative insights (e.g., community feedback, focus groups, interviews).
- Keep the process transparent so stakeholders understand how their input will be used.
- Incorporate reentry perspectives by inviting justice-involved individuals or advocates to share lived experiences that can inform equitable hiring and training strategies.
- Remember: Your goal is not to capture every detail at once, but to create a strong foundation for ongoing planning.

**TOOLKIT 5: Develop a Workforce | Activity 2 – WORKSHEET**

## Workforce Review Worksheet

Use the tables provided to assess the current state of the urban forestry workforce in your community. Start with the program(s) that you and your Workforce Committee are closely connected to. Then review quantitative and qualitative aspects of your regional workforce more broadly.

Before diving in, agree on the scope and focus of your Workforce Review:


- Define the geographic region you are assessing (e.g., city, county, region).
- Identify the focus sectors within the green jobs space (e.g., arboriculture, green infrastructure, climate resilience, native plant nursery work).
- Define your target workforce population (e.g., returning citizens, Opportunity Youth, or BIPOC workers).
- Decide on the time frame you want to analyze (e.g., current state only, 3–5 year projections).
- Connect your assessment to local tree canopy goals or other measurable outcomes (e.g., 40% tree canopy coverage).

 *Note: Some indicators may not apply to every region or organization, so focus on what's most relevant to your context.*

### Tips for articulating recommendations

Strive to be as precise and action-oriented as possible when articulating gaps and needs. Focus on solutions that are measurable, achievable and equity-driven. When considering recommendations, ask yourself:

- What's the missing link? (e.g., lack of specialized equipment training)
- What processes, systems or information are lacking? (e.g., no centralized job board for green jobs)
- What obstacles are preventing progress? (e.g., limited employer engagement in program design)
- Where are the gaps between goals and current conditions? (e.g., goal to diversify workforce vs. current workforce demographics)
- If we had \$100K, what would we do with it? (e.g., funding paid internships for underrepresented youth)
- What proven practices could be replicated locally? (e.g., PowerCorps Boston)

 *Note: Pair big-picture goals with “quick wins.” Small, visible successes like pilot training partnerships or short-term apprenticeships can build early momentum and attract new partners.*

## Sample Worksheet

| Indicator   | Status   | Recommendations  |
|---|--|--|
| How many types of employers are hiring (e.g., city agencies, nonprofits, private contractors, utilities)? | Most hiring is done by city agencies, utilities and private contractors.             | Improve coordination and standardize skills/certifications requirements across employers.    |
| Where are the biggest labor shortages or hard-to-fill positions?  | Seasonal tree care, planting and removal   | Increase visibility of green job opportunities and strengthen placement pipelines.           |
| What barriers (e.g., pay, seasonality, awareness, licensing) contribute to those shortages?               | Grant-based funding limits retention of seasonal employees and full-time continuity. | Develop multiyear funding plans and create mentorship or promotion pathways to retain staff. |

## My Workforce Program Review

Each member of your Workforce Committee should start by focusing on their own program(s) before you begin to look externally as a team. When all members have completed their reviews, compare notes to find areas of alignment, shared challenges and collective opportunities.

### My Workforce Program

| Indicator   | Status | Recommendations |
|---|--------|-----------------|
| What urban forestry-related workforce roles currently exist within your organization or department?                 |        |                 |
| What is the current funding model for your urban forestry workforce? (e.g., grants, city budget, private donations) |        |                 |
| How sustainable is the funding over the next 3–5 years?   |        |                 |
| Under your current budget, what percentage of necessary workforce activities can be completed?                      |        |                 |



## Quantitative Regional Workforce Review

The following two tables invite you to consider the state of the workforce in your region and, with an equity-focused lens, assess diversity and inclusion in the workforce.

### Where to gather data

If you have access to labor market data analysis tools (e.g., Lightcast, Chmura JobsEQ, Geographic Solutions, Indeed Hiring Lab), you can obtain detailed labor market data on:


- Job postings (volume, location, employer type)
- Wages and salary ranges
- Skills and certification in demand
- Employer hiring patterns

If you do not have access to these tools, use free, public data sources such as:

- Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS): Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics (OEWS), Employment Projections and Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW)
- O\*NET Online: Detailed occupational information, including tasks, skills and certifications
- State Labor Market Information (LMI) offices: State-specific employment, wage and industry trend data
- Local Workforce Development Boards: Regional reports, sector analyses and employer surveys
- City economic development departments: Industry and workforce reports

If there are accessibility limitations on employer data, connecting directly with employers can not only help you complete your review, but can also be a starting point for relationship building.

### Tips

 Use industry codes (NAICS) and occupation codes (SOC) to ensure you're pulling the right data for urban forestry-related jobs. When pulling labor market data from Lightcast, Chmura JobsEQ, BLS or state LMI portals, use a combination of NAICS and SOC codes to get a full picture. For example, NAICS 561730 + SOC 37-3013 will focus on tree care industry jobs. NAICS 813312 + SOC 45-4011 will focus on nonprofit forest conservation roles.

#### NAICS Codes:

- 561730 — Landscaping Services
- 115310 — Support Activities for Forestry
- 541620 — Environmental Consulting Services
- 813312 — Environmental, Conservation and Wildlife Organizations

#### SOC Codes:

- 37-3013 — Tree Trimmers and Pruners
- 37-3011 — Landscaping and Groundskeeping Workers
- 45-4011 — Forest and Conservation Workers
- 19-1032 — Foresters



| State of the Workforce  |        |                 |
|---|--------|-----------------|
| Indicator   | Status | Recommendations |
| How many job postings were listed in the past year?   |        |                 |
| Have job postings increased or decreased in the past five years? How much?  |        |                 |
| What entry-level, mid-level and leadership roles exist within your regional urban forestry career ladder?           |        |                 |
| What trends do you observe in job types or roles?   |        |                 |
| How many different types of employers are hiring (e.g., city agencies, nonprofits, private contractors, utilities)? |        |                 |
| What hiring patterns do employers show? Who is hiring most, how often, and for what kinds of positions?             |        |                 |
| What is the typical wage or salary range for urban forestry jobs in your area?                                      |        |                 |
| Which certifications are in demand in your area?  |        |                 |



## Workforce Diversity and Inclusion

| Indicator  | Status | Recommendations |
|--|--------|-----------------|
| What is the demographic makeup of your regional workforce (e.g., age, gender, race/ethnicity, educational background)? |        |                 |
| Are there differences in the demographic makeup of who enters, advances or stays in the field?                         |        |                 |
| What methods are used to track retention of diverse recruits and hires?  |        |                 |
| Are training and hiring practices inclusive and accessible to underrepresented groups?                                 |        |                 |
| Are workforce and training programs accessible to justice-involved or reentry populations?                             |        |                 |
| What partnerships exist or could be created with reentry organizations to support career pathways in urban forestry?   |        |                 |

## Qualitative Regional Workforce Review

Engage your Workforce Committee and other stakeholders to gain insights that numbers alone won't show. The following tables encourage qualitative reflection on workforce plans and policies, candidate recruitment and retention, employer placement, and workforce training and career pathways.

Consider the following approaches to gather qualitative data:

- Conduct interviews or listening sessions with employers, trainers, community advocates, and jobseekers.
- Use focus groups in low Tree Equity Score neighborhoods to understand barriers and opportunities (see [Activity 1.1](#) for help identifying low Tree Equity Score neighborhoods).
- Distribute short surveys to training program alumni or employers to understand experiences with recruitment, retention and skill development.

As you review your findings, look for:

- Skills or certifications consistently in demand but not widely available in current training programs
- Communities that remain underrepresented in the workforce
- Employers reporting challenges finding qualified candidates
- Opportunities for cross-training between urban forestry and related fields (e.g., landscaping, construction, utilities)

Worksheets continue  
on next page

**Workforce participants in the  
WorkForest Initiative inspect leaf  
health in Austin, TX.**





| <b>Workforce Plans and Policies</b>  |               |                        |
|--|---------------|------------------------|
| <b>Indicator</b>   | <b>Status</b> | <b>Recommendations</b> |
| What urban forestry workforce goals exist in local plans, policies and programs (e.g., climate action, green jobs, resilience plans)?  |               |                        |
| Are there measurable objectives or performance indicators for workforce development?   |               |                        |
| Does current training and workforce capacity support the implementation of urban forestry policies (e.g., invasive species removal, canopy expansion, climate adaptation)?                             |               |                        |
| Are there established standards or guidance for workforce qualifications, safety or certification?   |               |                        |
| How well do city departments and partner organizations coordinate workforce activities related to tree care, maintenance and infrastructure (e.g., sidewalk repair, storm response, park maintenance)? |               |                        |
| What level of political and institutional support exists for expanding urban forestry workforce programs/activities?   |               |                        |



## Candidate Recruitment and Retention

| Indicator   | Status | Recommendations |
|---|--------|-----------------|
| Do employers actively partner with community organizations, schools and training programs to recruit candidates?  |        |                 |
| Are recruitment efforts intentionally reaching underrepresented groups?   |        |                 |
| How visible are urban forestry career opportunities to youth and job seekers in your region?  |        |                 |
| Are there historical, cultural or structural barriers that limit interest or access to urban forestry careers (e.g., lack of representation, awareness, perceived opportunity)? |        |                 |
| What systems exist to support employee retention, such as mentorship, continuing education or wraparound supports such as childcare or transportation?                          |        |                 |
| Are there mechanisms for employees to safely raise and address workplace concerns?  |        |                 |
| What are typical retention rates across different workforce segments?   |        |                 |
| Do retention rates vary by demographics or role?  |        |                 |



| <b>Employer Placement</b>   |               |                        |
|---|---------------|------------------------|
| <b>Indicator</b>  | <b>Status</b> | <b>Recommendations</b> |
| Which sectors (e.g., government, nonprofit, private industry) have active or emerging urban forestry workforce needs?   |               |                        |
| What types of roles are most in demand across these sectors (e.g., field crews, planners, arborists, supervisors, analysts)?                                    |               |                        |
| How well are employer needs communicated to workforce training and education partners?  |               |                        |
| Do employers maintain relationships with community organizations, schools and training providers to recruit and place new hires or trainees?                    |               |                        |
| Are employers proactive in hiring from underrepresented or socioeconomically disadvantaged communities? What recruitment or partnership practices support this? |               |                        |
| Are there known hesitations, perceived risks or structural barriers that limit equitable hiring?  |               |                        |
| What are typical new employee retention rates after one year?   |               |                        |



| Employer Placement continued  |        |                 |
|---|--------|-----------------|
| Indicator   | Status | Recommendations |
| How do wages, benefits and working conditions compare to regional or industry standards?  |        |                 |
| Are there opportunities for advancement, cross-training or continuing education to help retain employees?                       |        |                 |
| Do employers have clear diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) policies or training in place to guide recruitment and retention? |        |                 |

Worksheets continue on next page

**‘Giving Tree’ interactive awareness building tool at planting registration table. Side A states different tree benefits and Side B has action prompt ‘hashtag/donate’ - leaves are selected off tree by participants to take home.**





| <b>Workforce Training and Career Pathways</b>  |               |                        |
|--|---------------|------------------------|
| <b>Indicator</b>   | <b>Status</b> | <b>Recommendations</b> |
| What training programs currently prepare people with skills relevant to urban forestry and related green jobs?     |               |                        |
| Is green infrastructure or urban forestry-specific training available?   |               |                        |
| What training programs, apprenticeships or certifications help people move up the career ladder?                   |               |                        |
| What percentage of trainees complete these programs annually, and how many transition into jobs within six months? |               |                        |
| Are programs accessible to residents of underserved neighborhoods?   |               |                        |
| Do training programs align with current employer needs and required certifications (e.g., ISA, OSHA, CDL)?         |               |                        |
| Is funding for training programs consistent across fiscal years to maintain cohort continuity?                     |               |                        |



**Workforce Training and Career Pathways continued**

| Indicator  | Status | Recommendations |
|--|--------|-----------------|
| Are job placements leading to long-term, stable employment or career advancement?  |        |                 |
| Are there new or emerging roles in the green economy that training should address?   |        |                 |
| Is your workforce development approach mostly reactive (filling immediate vacancies) or proactive (long-term talent development)?  |        |                 |
| What urban forestry needs could be filled by job creation (e.g., monitoring and maintenance, street tree inventory, wood waste processing)?                                |        |                 |
| Are youth programs, internships or community colleges connected to urban forestry career opportunities?  |        |                 |
| Are urban forestry, green careers or environmental science concepts integrated into K-12 curricula? If so, which local schools or organizations are leading these efforts? |        |                 |

## Take the Next Step

### Document and share findings.

- Summarize the key takeaways from your Workforce Review, including current assets, priority gaps and key recommendations.
- Create a one-page “Workforce Snapshot Summary” to share findings with city leaders or funders.
- Host a Workforce Review Roundtable where partners discuss shared priorities and co-create an action agenda.
- Highlight insights that directly connect to your Tree Equity goals (e.g., increasing canopy cover in low-equity neighborhoods).
- Share findings with your broader Tree Equity coalition or advisory group to validate observations and build collective ownership of next steps.

### Keep your review as a living resource.

Your Workforce Review should evolve as conditions, funding, and partnerships change.

- Track measurable outcomes, such as the number of partners engaged or barriers identified, for quarterly reporting.
- Schedule periodic updates (e.g., annually or biannually).
- Add new data sources as they become available (e.g., employer feedback, local training data).
- Continue to incorporate community and participant feedback.



*Note: Track updates in a shared digital folder or versioned worksheets so you can monitor trends and progress over time.*

### Translate your recommendations into action.

Building on insights from your Workforce Review, your Workforce Committee can now move toward implementation planning by turning recommendations into actionable goals and strategies.

1. Set clear goals (e.g., increase participation of underrepresented workers in training programs by 25% within two years).
2. Identify short-, medium- and long-term workforce development priorities.
  - a. Short-term (3–6 months): Launch informational sessions or quick-win partnerships.
  - b. Medium-term (6–18 months): Develop employer agreements and standardized curricula.
  - c. Long-term (2–5 years): Establish apprenticeship programs or policy frameworks.
3. Identify actionable strategies for recruitment and retention, employer engagement, training and upskilling, wraparound support services, funding, and policy alignment.
4. Define roles and responsibilities among partners to ensure accountability.
5. Identify resources, funding sources and potential policy supports to sustain your efforts.
6. Use data and storytelling together to secure buy-in from funders, policymakers and community members.
7. Create simple tracking tools to measure progress and celebrate early wins.

## Activity 5.2: Workforce Review

Toolkit 5: Develop a Workforce

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