



# Tree Equity Handbook

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

**→ Toolkit 6:  
Fund Your Program**

Issued November 2025





**We envision a world in which the significant environmental, societal and economic benefits of forests are fully realized and equitably available to all people.**

Above: Alamo Colleges Communications



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# Welcome to the Tree Equity Handbook!

Join the movement to shape a future where cities and towns have the resources to sustain a thriving urban forest with transformative benefits, particularly for people in under-resourced communities.

Advancing Tree Equity takes far more than planting trees. It demands a comprehensive approach grounded in deep community engagement, coalition building, policy change and skilled workforce development. It requires scaling up climate-resilient tree supply and implementing arboricultural best practices to manage urban forest health. It calls for innovative financing strategies and new systems for wood reuse, carbon capture and carbon storage.

City staff and officials, urban forestry practitioners, community leaders and advocacy champions — this handbook is your step-by-step guide to activate, focus and lead a community-wide Tree Equity movement. This resource is for you if you are starting from scratch, or if you need tools to re-inspire and refocus your process. You will join a community of practice across the country taking parallel action in their own cities, towns and neighborhoods.

Thank you for joining us on this important journey. Let's make this vision for Tree Equity a reality!



# We Need Tree Equity in Cities

Trees are more than scenery. Much like schools, streets and sewer lines, they are crucial elements of our community infrastructure. Trees play a vital role in supporting public health, well-being and climate resilience.

Trees in cities and towns across the U.S. absorb 17.4 million tons of air pollutants annually, preventing 670,000 cases of asthma and other acute respiratory symptoms every year.<sup>1</sup> Trees help prevent hundreds of heat-related deaths and more than 50,000 doctor's visits annually<sup>2</sup> by lowering surface and air temperatures. On average, trees in the U.S. reduce energy demand for heating and cooling by 7.2%.<sup>3</sup>

However, Americans do not enjoy the same access to the benefits of urban trees and green spaces.

Nationwide, American Forests' Tree Equity Score shows areas with the lowest poverty rates have double the tree cover per person and are 6 degrees cooler than areas with the highest. Areas with the fewest residents of color have four times more tree cover per person and are 13 degrees cooler than areas with the most.

This is a direct result of decades of systemic and inequitable governance and planning. These disparities have the most impact on communities of color, economically disadvantaged neighborhoods and other people facing institutional barriers, all of whom are disproportionately affected by environmental hazards such as extreme heat waves, air pollution and degraded water supply. It's time to change that and reinvest in our communities.



<sup>1</sup> Nowak, D.J., S. Hirabayashi, A. Bodine, E. Greenfield. 2014. Tree and forest effects on air quality and human health in the United States. *Environmental Pollution*. 193: 119-129.

<sup>2</sup> McDonald, R.I., T. Kroeger, P. Zhang, P. Hamel. 2020. The value of US urban tree cover for reducing heat-related health impacts and electricity consumption. *Ecosystems*. 23:137-150.

<sup>3</sup> Nowak, D.J., N. Appleton, E. Ellis, E. Greenfield. 2017. Residential building energy conservation and avoided power plant emissions by urban and community trees in the United States. *Urban Forestry and Urban Greening*. 21: 158-165.

# A Tree Equity Approach

The Tree Equity Handbook employs a strategic, community-led approach to building an equity-forward urban forestry program:

- **Data-Driven Planning:** Use data combined with local knowledge to prioritize investment in historically under-resourced areas.
- **Community Engagement:** Create strong decision-making roles for community leaders and representatives to ensure that actions respond to local needs and priorities.
- **Forestry for People:** Develop coordinated strategies for managing urban forests to maximize benefits to people and ensure long-term health and community resilience.
- **Capacity Building:** Collaboratively develop strategies that support program growth, sustainable funding, scaled up systems and workforce development to build a stable support system for urban forests in the long term.



Liz Putnam / Liz Putnam Photography

## Toolkit 6

# Fund Your Program

You know what your Tree Equity goals are, who will be involved, and how your coalition aims to pursue those goals. Now it's time to place one of the most important pieces of the puzzle: Where your funding will come from.

Building or expanding an urban forestry program to include Tree Equity objectives usually comes with added expenses — from specialized staff who engage with community partners to additional tree stock and planting resources. These new

expenses, however, can create opportunities for new funding mechanisms. Use this toolkit to assess your Tree Equity funding needs, identify potential new sources of support, and develop effective strategies to make your case to funders.

### Big Deliverables:

Funding Needs Assessment, Funding Mechanisms and Priorities, Funder Inventory and Engagement Strategy



# Activity 1: Tree Equity Funding Needs Assessment

Toolkit 6

Fund Your Program

## Activity Map

Tree Equity Funding  
Needs Assessment

→ Funding Mechanisms  
and Priorities

→ Funder Inventory and  
Engagement Strategy



# Tree Equity Funding Needs Assessment



## Overview & Basic Steps

Much like a typical budgeting exercise, this activity is designed to help you identify where you have budget shortfalls to meet your Tree Equity goals. Drawing from the equity-focused Coalition Action Plan you developed in [Toolkit 3](#), you will compare your current budget to your anticipated funding needs, determining not just how much more funding you need to secure overall, but where additional resources will be most needed to implement your vision for Tree Equity. The activities that follow will help you identify specific funding sources for each Tree Equity funding gap.

**Suggested Time:** 1 week

**Level of Difficulty:** Moderate

**Participants:** 1–2 individuals with strong knowledge of the finances and/or programmatic budget

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## Before starting this activity, you might need:

- A Tree Equity Coalition Action Plan → [Toolkit 3.4](#)

## Instructions

- 1 Gain a detailed understanding of your Tree Equity budget needs, from funding sources to dollars needed, by completing the **Funding Needs Worksheet** ([page 12](#))
- 2 (Optional) Download the editable spreadsheet provided on our website. → [Funding Needs Template](#)

## After you complete this activity:

- Identify funding mechanisms and priorities → [page 14](#)
- Develop a funder inventory and engagement strategy → [page 22](#)

**TOOLKIT 6: Fund Your Program | Activity 1 – WORKSHEET**

## Funding Needs Worksheet

Start by entering estimates of your current budget for each line item under “Current Budget.” For any rows where you currently have no budget or budgeting needs, enter zeros. Add a note on the current source or sources of funding for that line item.

Then refer to your Coalition Action Plan priorities ([Toolkit 3](#)) to enter additional budget estimates under “Tree Equity Budget Needs.” Be sure to consider a timeline as you work on this section: Are you budgeting for the next year, or longer? If you’re just starting a program from scratch, a shorter timeline might be easier to manage so that you can focus on immediate needs.

Finally, for each line item, subtract the dollar value of the current budget from the estimated dollar value of your Tree Equity budget needs. This is your funding gap.

Choose from one the two templates provided to build your budget either by specific line-item expenditures (1a) or overall programmatic deliverables that include various components (1b). Adapt either template as needed to your specific budget needs.

If you prefer, you can download the editable spreadsheet provided on our website. → [Funding Needs Template](#)

See next page for the example worksheet

Scholarship presentation at Upward Ground Southern University



Loren Sullivan / American Forests

## Sample Worksheet

Expenditure	Current Budget		Tree Equity Budget Needs			Funding Gap	
	Estimated Dollars	Funder	Estimated Dollars	Funding Secured	Funder	% Uncovered	Dollars Needed
Nursery Stock	\$180,000	State grant	\$100,000	\$80,000	Private Foundation	20%	\$20,000
Trees for planting	\$300,000	City allocation / fines	\$100,000	\$0	N/A	100%	\$100,000
Travel	\$10,000	City allocation					
Supplies	\$10,000	City allocation					
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>\$500,000</b>	<b>50%</b>					
<b>Staff + Fringe</b>							
Position 1	\$125,000	City allocation					
Position 2	\$100,000	City allocation					
Position 3	\$100,000	State grant					
Position 4	\$75,000	Fines & Fees					
Position 5			\$90,000	\$18,000	Individual donor	20%	\$72,000
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>\$400,000</b>	<b>40%</b>					
Overhead	\$100,000	10%	\$10,000	\$2,000	City Allocation	20%	\$8,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$1,000,000</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>\$300,000</b>	<b>\$100,000</b>		<b>66%</b>	<b>\$200,000</b>

See next page for the fillable worksheet

## Funding Needs Worksheet 1a (Line-Item Expenditures)

Expenditure	Current Budget		Funder	Tree Equity Budget Needs		Funding Gap	
	Estimated Dollars	% of Total Budget		Current Sources	Estimated Dollars	% of Total Budget	% Uncovered
<b>Capital Expenditures/Direct Costs</b>							
Nursery Stock							
Trees for Planting							
Travel							
Fuel							
Supplies							
Software Licensing Fees							
Data Storage Fees							
Communications Material							
Other:							
<b>Subtotal</b>							
<b>Staff</b>							
Contractor/ Consultant Fees							
Forestry Manager/ City Forester							
Community Engagement Specialist							
Specialist/Inspector							
Clerical Support Office							
Working Foreman (Crew Chief)							
Plan Review Arborist							
Arborist (Pruning/ Trimming)							
Equipment Operator							
Laborer							
Seasonal Worker							
Truck Driver							
Other:							
Other:							
<b>Subtotal</b>							
<b>Total</b>							



## Funding Needs Worksheet 1b (Program Expenditures)

Activity	Current Budget		Funder	Tree Equity Budget Needs		Funding Gap	
	Estimated Dollars	% of Total Budget		Current Sources	Estimated Dollars	% of Total Budget	% Uncovered
<b>Ongoing Maintenance</b>							
Tree Pruning							
Tree Maintenance							
Watering/ Fertilization							
Forest Health Care							
Impervious Surface Removal							
<b>Tree Inventory</b>							
Tree Inspections							
Data Collection/ Software							
Database Management							
Equipment							
<b>Tree Planting</b>							
Nursery Development							
Tree Planting							
Tree Establishment							
<b>Ad Hoc</b>							
Storm Response							
Tree Removal							
Stump Removal							
Tree Repair							
<b>Program</b>							
Supervision							
Safety Training							
Employee Training							
Contractor Registration							
Office Expenses							
Administration							
<b>Other</b>							
Public Engagement							
<b>Total</b>							



## Activity Map

→ Tree Equity Funding Needs Assessment

Funding Mechanisms and Priorities

→ Funder Inventory and Engagement Strategy

## Activity 2: Funding Mechanisms and Priorities

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Fund Your Program

# Funding Mechanisms and Priorities



## Overview & Basic Steps

With your Tree Equity funding gaps identified, use the following activity to consider every potential funding source to close those gaps and scale your equity-forward initiatives. Remember that most urban forestry programs are supported by a tapestry of funding sources. An equity focus creates numerous intersections between your Tree Equity goals and the priorities of other organizations and funders, opening more opportunities that may not have been available to you previously — or that you may not have considered in the first place.

**Suggested Time:** 1–2 weeks

**Level of Difficulty:** Moderate

**Participants:** Select Tree Equity Coalition members and staff or collaborators with financing and fundraising experience

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

- Funding Needs Worksheet → [page 12](#)

## Instructions

- 1** Use the **Funding Opportunities Assessment Worksheet** ([page 17](#)) to understand your current funding sources and identify additional sources for current or future funding needs.
- 2** Use the **Funding Priorities Ranking Worksheet** ([page 21](#)) to identify five high-priority funding sources that are timely and achievable and will bring momentum to your Tree Equity initiative.

### After you complete this activity:

- Develop a funder inventory and engagement strategy → [page 22](#)

## TOOLKIT 6: Fund Your Program | Activity 2 – WORKSHEET 1

# Funding Opportunities Assessment Worksheet



Use this exercise to build a comprehensive assessment of the funding mechanisms available to you, establishing the current funding status (if applicable) and identifying future funding needs from each source.

This worksheet is broken into four columns:

- 1. Funding Mechanism:** This column provides common forms of urban forestry program funding, divided into regulatory and market-based sources. Fill out only the rows that are applicable to your program and feel free to add your own mechanisms in the blank rows.
- 2. Current Status:** Use this column to include either the dollar amount of funds received for your program if you have that information or simply identify each funding source as “Active,” “Inactive,” “In Process,” or “Not Available” for you locally.
- 3. End/Renewal Date:** If a certain funding mechanism is already active for your program, use this column to indicate when that source of funding will end or renew. This will help you understand timing and set priorities for future fundraising efforts.
- 4. Future Funding Needs:** Using your Coalition Action Plan priorities identified in Toolkit 3, Activity 4, describe in this column how you would like to use each available funding source. Specific budget numbers will be included in a later worksheet. At this point you are simply connecting programmatic needs to possible funding opportunities.



### Tips for Articulating Gaps/Needs

Generally, most funding for urban forestry programs comes from government allocations or regulatory programs. Market-based sources are used to supplement specific projects or initiatives that can sustain themselves on earned revenue. Make sure to look for opportunities to incorporate tree canopy expenses into broader funding for streetscape projects, new developments, park renovations and other initiatives where tree infrastructure could be considered an eligible expense within a broader budget. Use the **Government/Regulatory Sources** section to focus on your core programmatic needs and the **Market-Based Financing** section to supplement those needs, perhaps on a longer timeline.

## Sample Worksheet

Funding Mechanism	Current Status	End/Renewal Date	New Funding Could Support
<b>Municipal General Fund</b>	Active \$3,500,000	Renew Oct. 1st	Staffing, 7-year tree maintenance cycle, office, equipment...
<b>State Grants</b>	In process ~\$500,000	End June 30th	Planting in 3 low Tree Equity Score neighborhoods
<b>Federal Grants</b>	Inactive	N/A	Replace tree canopy lost in rapidly developing areas
<b>Community Development Block Grants</b>	Not Available	N/A	N/A

## Funding Opportunities Assessment Worksheet

Government/Regulatory Sources			
Funding Mechanism	Current Status	End/Renewal Date	New Funding Could Support
<b>Municipal General Fund</b>			
<b>State Grants</b>			
<b>Federal Grants</b>			
<b>Community Development Block Grants</b>			
<b>Stormwater Fees</b>			
<b>Road Use Fees</b>			
<b>Development/Permit Fees</b>			
<b>Environmental Impact Bond</b>			



Worksheet continues on next page



<b>Government/Regulatory Sources</b>			
<b>Funding Mechanism</b>	<b>Current Status</b>	<b>End/Renewal Date</b>	<b>New Funding Could Support</b>
<b>Frontage Tax</b>			
<b>Mill Levy</b>			
<b>Assessment District</b>			
<b>Service Fees</b>			
<b>Vehicle/Gas Tax</b>			
<b>Hazard Mitigation</b>			
<b>Tree Removal Mitigation Fees or Fines</b>			
<b>Revenue Sharing</b>			
<b>Urban Forests Quantified as Asset Class for Return on Investment</b>			
<b>Memorials</b>			
<b>Other:</b>			

Worksheet continues on next page



<b>Market-Based Financing</b>			
<b>Funding Mechanism</b>	<b>Current Status</b>	<b>End/Renewal Date</b>	<b>New Funding Could Support</b>
<b>Municipal Donations</b>			
<b>Endowment</b>			
<b>Wood Sales</b>			
<b>Job Corps Contracts</b>			
<b>Carbon Credits</b>			
<b>Social Impact Financing (public health, prison recidivism, job creation, etc.)</b>			
<b>Other:</b>			

**TOOLKIT 6: Fund Your Program | Activity 2 – WORKSHEET 2**

## Funding Priorities Ranking Worksheet

Once you’ve completed your **Funding Opportunities Assessment** ([page 17](#)), you may have what feels like an overwhelming to-do list! Use the following exercise to narrow this list down to just **five top priorities** that you want to pursue first. Rank these priorities in numerical order, working with coalition members to determine which funding sources you should pursue first.

When setting your funding priorities, consider not just the importance of each funding opportunity to your program, but also:

- **Time:** Can this funding source be secured quickly? Does it address an urgent need? How soon do you need to take action in order to secure this funding?
- **Achievability:** Can you reasonably expect to secure this source of funding quickly? Does your coalition have the resources to apply for this opportunity?
- **Momentum:** Will this funding source lend forward motion to your program and bring you closer to your Tree Equity goals?

### Sample Worksheet

Priority Rank	Funding Opportunity	Target / Deadline Date	Next Steps
#1	State grant	Proposals due 4/30	Contact State U&CF Coordinator Draft project scope for Committee review

See next page for the fillable worksheet

## Funding Priorities Ranking Worksheet

Priority Rank	Funding Opportunity	Target / Deadline Date	Next Steps
#1			
#2			
#3			
#4			
#5			

## Activity Map

→ Tree Equity Funding Needs Assessment

→ Funding Mechanisms and Priorities

Funder Inventory and Engagement Strategy

## Activity 3: Funder Inventory and Engagement Strategy

Toolkit 6

Fund Your Program

# Funder Inventory and Engagement Strategy



## Overview & Basic Steps

In the Tree Equity space, philanthropic funders often have missions that never mention trees or nature. But urban forests provide living infrastructure that can support many civic needs and goals: improving public health or educational outcomes, improving walkability and transit usage, reducing air and water pollution, and more. This activity helps you match your coalition's funding needs (identified in [Activity 1, page 12](#)) to strategic opportunities from a wide range of potential funding sources that your stakeholder committee can pursue.

As you work through this exercise, consider all possible intersections between your mission and your potential funders' interests. This will not only broaden your opportunities but will also inform effective engagement strategies that help you make a strong case for Tree Equity.

**Suggested Time:** 4–6 weeks

**Level of Difficulty:** Difficult

**Participants:** Tree Equity Coalition members

## Before starting this activity, you might need:

- Funding Needs Worksheet → [page 12](#)

## Instructions

- 1 Complete the **Funding Inventory Worksheet** ([page 25](#)) to identify potential funders and begin to develop outreach strategies.

**TOOLKIT 6: Fund Your Program | Activity 3 – WORKSHEET**

## Funding Opportunities Assessment Worksheet



For the following exercise, fill in each column as follows:

- 1. Funding Source:** List one realistic philanthropic funding source that you want to pursue or protect to accomplish your programmatic goals.
- 2. Funder Interest:** Describe what types of projects or programs that each particular funder prioritizes, whether in general or for a specific upcoming funding opportunity.
- 3. Contact:** Add as much contact information as you have for specific individuals.
- 4. Strategic Opportunities:** What role does the contact have at their organization? What funding opportunities are they responsible for overseeing?
- 5. Outreach Level:** Assess the level of relationship you or others in your program have with the contact. Use the following key (modified from resources by the Afterschool Alliance):
  - 0 = Do not know this person, have not contacted
  - 1 = Know who this person is, but have not contacted
  - 2 = Have contacted this person, but have not made any specific ask
  - 3 = Currently working with this person to support the program

Add any relevant notes here about the contact’s role/relationships in the community.

- 6. Coalition Point Person/Next Steps:** Assign the most appropriate person from your coalition to take the lead on developing or maintaining that relationship, as well as initial next steps for the help that individual get started.

### Sample Worksheet

<b>Funding Source #1</b>	Carmichael Family Fund
<b>Funder Interest</b>	Social entrepreneurship, public health, climate
<b>Contact Name</b>	Patricia Seawell, Environment Program Director
<b>Strategic Opportunities</b>	Upcoming philanthropic roundtable meeting; Proposal cycle deadline March 4th
<b>Outreach Level</b>	3 <input type="checkbox"/> 2 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Stanley H. served on a board with Patricia 2021–2023 1 <input type="checkbox"/> 0 <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Point Person/Next Steps</b>	Stanley Huang 1. Talk with Patricia at next philanthropic roundtable meeting

# Funder Inventory Worksheet

Feel free to replicate the templates below for as many funding opportunities as you wish.



<b>Funding Source #1</b>	
<b>Funder Interest</b>	
<b>Contact Name</b>	
<b>Strategic Opportunities</b>	
<b>Outreach Level</b>	<p>3</p> <p>2</p> <p>1</p> <p>0</p>
<b>Point Person/Next Steps</b>	



<b>Funding Source #2</b>	
<b>Funder Interest</b>	
<b>Contact Name</b>	
<b>Strategic Opportunities</b>	
<b>Outreach Level</b>	<p>3</p> <p>2</p> <p>1</p> <p>0</p>
<b>Point Person/Next Steps</b>	

Worksheets continue on next page



<b>Funding Source #3</b>	
<b>Funder Interest</b>	
<b>Contact Name</b>	
<b>Strategic Opportunities</b>	
<b>Outreach Level</b>	<p>3</p> <p>2</p> <p>1</p> <p>0</p>
<b>Point Person/Next Steps</b>	

Worksheets continue on next page



<b>Funding Source #4</b>	
<b>Funder Interest</b>	
<b>Contact Name</b>	
<b>Strategic Opportunities</b>	
<b>Outreach Level</b>	<p>3</p> <p>2</p> <p>1</p> <p>0</p>
<b>Point Person/Next Steps</b>	

## Toolkit 6

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