

**Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation Urban and Community Forestry**

**Challenge Grant Application Intent to Apply Form**

# What are Massachusetts Urban and Community Forestry Challenge Grants?

The Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) Urban and Community Forestry Program offers **50-50 matching grants\*** to municipalities and nonprofit groups in Massachusetts communities of **all sizes** for the purpose of building local capacity for excellent urban and community forestry at the local and regional level.

**\***Match requirement for environmental justice projects is 75-25.

Urban and Community Forestry grant funds are provided by the USDA Forest Service and administered by DCR with guidance from the Massachusetts Tree Wardens’ and Foresters’ Association. The DCR Urban and Community Forestry Program ***assists communities and nonprofit groups in their efforts to protect and manage community trees and forest ecosystems, with the ultimate aim of improving the environment and enhancing livability of all of Massachusetts’ communities.***

**What is Urban and Community Forestry?**

For the purpose of these grants, Urban and Community Forestry refers to professional management (planting, protection, and maintenance) of a municipality’s public tree resources in partnership with residents and community institutions.

On a broader scale, Urban and Community Forestry involves the community in the management of all a municipality’s or a region’s “green infrastructure” in order to maximize social, economic, and environmental quality. For a more detailed description, see: [www.mass.gov/dcr/ucf](http://www.mass.gov/dcr/ucf)

# Step 1: Intent to Apply.

If you or your organization is considering applying for this grant, you **must** submit our one-page **Intent to Apply Form** (page 7 of this packet). You may submit this form at any time during the year, but it should be received by October 1, one month in advance of the full grant proposal deadline, November 1. Our staff will follow up with you on your idea.

**Who can apply?**

Eligible groups include all units of local government and nonprofit 501(c) (3) organizations. Local tree departments and citizen tree groups are specifically encouraged to apply.

**How much money can we apply for under an Urban Forestry Grant?**

Grant awards range from $1,000 to $40,000. Applicants should apply for the amount of challenge funds that their projects require. Larger communities are likely to be more competitive for larger grant amounts. Remember all grants must be matched 50-50 by local funds or in-kind contributions (or 75-25 for environmental justice applicants; see below for details.)

**Environmental Justice**

The DCR, in collaboration with the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EOEEA), offers competitive challenge grants for projects that serve environmental justice (EJ) populations. If your town or city is home to environmental justice neighborhoods and grant work will serve environmental justice populations, you can apply as an Environmental Justice applicant for a **75-25 matching grant**. Projects must take place entirely within EJ areas. For exceptions, contact DCR Urban and Community Forestry staff to discuss project and eligibility.

Eligible groups include all units of local government and nonprofit 501(c) (3) organizations that are working in environmental justice communities in Massachusetts. As a result of EOEEA’s 2021 Environmental Justice Policy, MassGIS has identified and mapped EJ populations. To review the most recent EJ populations map, based on the 2020 census, go to: <https://mass-eoeea.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=535e4419dc0545be980545a0eeaf9b53>

# What can we apply for under this grant?

This grant program seeks to fund projects which **will result in** **sustained improvements** in local capacity for excellent urban and community forestry management in seven key areas:

## Building and Strengthening Citizen Advocacy and Action Organizations

We seek to fund projects that develop, strengthen, or sustain citizen groups or nonprofit organizations that advocate and/or act to promote excellent urban and community forestry management. Examples of such groups include a Friends of Trees, an official Tree Committee, or a community trees-oriented nonprofit. Priority will be given to projects that result in the development of new groups in communities that do not currently have them.

## Community Wood Bank Special Grant Opportunity

We seek to fund projects that establish or expand existing community efforts to address household energy insecurity with local forests. By recycling decommissioned trees into firewood and distributing this resource to residents in need of heating assistance forests provide additional public benefit beyond their growing life. This strategy offers an alternative disposal method for municipalities and provides citizens with the opportunity to engage with forest grown products to improve the lives of others. **Note:** Funding for Community Wood Bank projects is currently capped at **$10,000** per applicant. Regional projects serving multiple towns are encouraged to apply, but should base the maximum requested amount on the number of towns served by the project. E.g., A three town regional wood bank could request a maximum amount of $30,000. 3 towns X $10,000 per town = $30,000 limit.

## Developing and Adopting Tree and Forest Ordinances and Policies

We seek to fundprojects to develop, approve, and implement new ordinances, zoning regulations, or written policies that will result in improved tree and forest management and the preservation of tree canopy on a community scale. All projects should include implementation strategies such as staff training, public awareness, and outreach to other municipal departments or enforcement mechanisms. Efforts to document and put in writing existing policies are also encouraged.

## Securing or Training Professional Staff

All Massachusetts communities should have a qualified Tree Warden with professional training. Communities over 10,000 inhabitants are required to do so by law. We will consider projects that result in sustained improvements in professional staffing in a municipality’s urban and community forestry program. Projects could include funding a Tree Warden’s arborist certification training, tree risk assessment qualification, attendance at training courses such as the Municipal Forestry Institute, MA Qualified Tree Wardens Course, or Green School, a cost-share effort to create a new city forester position or hiring a consultant to assist in community forest management. This grant category is not intended to provide ongoing funding for professional staff or as a substitute source of funding for positions currently funded.

## Developing and Implementing Systematic Urban Forestry Management

Priority may be given to communities that have a qualified tree warden currently in place.

* **Tree** **Inventory and Analysis –** We seek to fund systematic inventories of public trees on streets, parks, schools, and other public areas. All tree inventories must include collection of pest and disease information. The inventory must be tied to future routine tree maintenance or future tree planting. The inventory must be conducted by someone experienced in conducting these types of resource assessments, preferably a certified arborist. Volunteers participating in the assessment must be trained and knowledgeable of industry protocols. Priority will be given to inventories that will result in a management plan. The community will provide DCR with a copy of the resulting inventory and analysis.
* **Resource Assessment** - Resource assessments may include a traditional tree inventory, canopy analysis using satellite or aerial photography, an i-Tree Eco analysis, a GIS analysis, or a survey of available planting sites in a community. The assessment must be conducted by someone experienced in conducting these types of resource assessments, preferably a certified arborist. Volunteers participating in the assessment must be trained and knowledgeable of industry protocols. The community will provide DCR with a copy of the resulting assessment and analysis.
* **Management Plans or Street Tree Management / Master Plans** - Management plans or master plans guide the strategic management of urban forest resources at the community level. Plans should be based on a professional resource assessment. Such projects could include the development of a street tree management plan, implementation of a tree inventory system, or the inclusion of an urban forestry component in a master plan or open space plan. This funding can also be used to develop plans for storm or disaster response and invasive insect mitigation (e.g., a response plan for emerald ash borer). We encourage communities to avoid “re-inventing wheels,” and we support efforts to make use of existing inventory systems, adapt existing management plans, or add to related management documents. A copy of the inventory and management plan will be provided to DCR. Contact DCR Urban and Community Forestry to discuss other types of plans.

## Completing Strategic Community Tree Plantings and “Heritage” Tree Care Projects

* Strategic Tree Plantings **-**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Grant Funding Request** | **Eligibility** |
| $1,000 - $7,000 | All communities may apply |
| $7,001 - $20,000 | Community must be a Tree City USA |
| $20,001 - $40,000 | Must contact DCR Urban and Community Forestry staff to discuss project and eligibility |

We will consider projects that include high-visibility community tree plantings that enhance environmental and aesthetic quality, strengthen community involvement, and follow the principles of planting the right trees in the right places. Priority will be given to strategic planting projects that

* originate from a broad base of community support,
* include a well-planned educational component,
* include a public awareness campaign or event, and/or
* utilize volunteers and community partners.

All planting projects must incorporate the principles of planting the **right trees in the right places**. Only approved low-growing species may be planted in proximity to utility infrastructure. Applications must include a list and map of specific locations, species, and sizes of trees to be planted, along with a maintenance plan.

**Species notes**: Due to emerald ash borer, grant funds cannot be used to plant any species of ash (*Fraxinus*) or fringetree (*Chionanthus*). In the Asian longhorned beetle regulated area in Worcester County, grant funds cannot be used to plant any trees that are host species for Asian longhorned beetle. (For the host list, see: <http://massnrc.org/pests/albdocs/ALBtreeguide.pdf>.) In Massachusetts, it is prohibited to purchase the following species (and all cultivars), and grant funds cannot be used to plant them: Norway maple (*Acer platanoides*), sycamore maple (*Acer pseudoplatanus*), tree of heaven (*Ailanthus altissima*), Amur corktree (*Phellodendron amurense*), and black locust (*Robinia pseudoacacia*). For more information on prohibited plants, see <http://www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/agr/farm-products/plants/massachusetts-prohibited-plant-list.html>.

* “Heritage” Tree Care Projects **-** We will also consider projects that include professional arborist care of “Heritage” trees (those larger trees over 32” in diameter that have a *documented* cultural and/or historical significance) if these projects also result in enhanced public awareness and support for urban and community forestry and/or improved community tree care.

A tree may be a “Heritage” tree because of its association with a historic/cultural event, person, or time period, or it may be that the community has identified it as deserving “Heritage” recognition and has designated it as a “Heritage” tree. Your application for a “Heritage” tree care project should include supporting documentation of the cultural and/or historical significance of the tree(s) in question. Documentation may include historic photos, text, press releases, or other publicity regarding the tree. While trees that communities identify as “Heritage” may benefit from increased public awareness, being designated a “Heritage” tree does not afford any special legal protection under the Commonwealth’s Shade Tree Law (M.G.L Ch. 87).

## Other Projects

We may consider some well-conceived and executed projects which result in sustained improvements to urban and community forestry management in other areas. For example, we have funded community-wide urban forestry education programs, partnerships and multi-community approaches for improved tree maintenance, projects that substantively involve under-represented groups in urban forestry, or projects that result in greater local funding for urban forestry.

**Intent to Apply forms are due on or before October 1 and full grant proposals are due on or before November 1. We strongly encourage you to contact the DCR Urban & Community Forestry Program as early as possible to discuss your project.**

# Answers to Frequently Asked Questions

**What should we do first if we are interested in applying for an Urban Forestry Challenge Grant?**

Read over this entire application packet very carefully! Talk to others in your community, including your Tree Warden. Then submit an **Intent to Apply Form**.

**What exactly is a “challenge” grant or “matching” grant?**

The applicant must match the grant amount requested, dollar for dollar, with other non-federal funds or in-kind services. In other words, half of the project’s total cost must be covered by the applicant. **For environmental justice applicants:** the match requirement is 75-25; every dollar must be matched by $0.25 with other non-federal funds or in-kind services. Matching funds or services may be either cash or “in-kind” and may come from local/state grants, donations, labor, or equipment. You may use current reasonable rates (i.e., the value of a professional consultant’s time based upon the consultant’s standard hourly rate of pay) when estimating the value of volunteer time or services. Employee salaries are considered “in-kind” if the employee would still be paid regardless of the grant. Matching funds for this grant may not be used as a match for any other federal cost-share grant project.

**What activities can be funded under an Urban Forestry Challenge Grant?**

These grant funds can be used for any activity related to your project **except:** food and beverages, pass-through grant programs, childcare, excessive administrative overhead, stipends for board members, regular tree maintenance, construction costs or capital improvements (other than tree planting), expenses incurred *before* or *after* the grant period, and costs associated with *preparing* the grant application.

**If a grant is awarded, how will the funds become available?**

Once the grants are awarded, typically in the spring following the grant deadline, recipients are reimbursed for satisfactory work completed within the contract period. (Projects **cannot** begin until the contract is signed by the Commissioner of the DCR.) **Funds are not provided up front**. Final receipts for reimbursement must be submitted along with verification of matching expenses or in-kind services. Completed reimbursement forms shall be submitted to the Department within 30 days of contract completion. Grantees can expect reimbursement within 45 days of receipt submittal. A reimbursement guide can be found here: <https://www.mass.gov/guides/urban-and-community-forestry-challenge-grants>

**Should we include letters of support?**

Projects that include a broad range of partners and participants will be favored. Letters of support from key cooperators will strengthen the application and should include specific commitments (e.g., amount of volunteer labor committed, estimated graphic design services, office space, etc.) and not just a general statement of support. **All applications** **must also include a** **letter from the Tree Warden** indicating the Tree Warden’s involvement in the project.

**What is the timeline for grant programs?**

Grant recipients will be given up to 12 months to complete their project. Approved projects may begin only after contract forms are signed and submitted by the grantee and a fully executed contract is returned to the grantee by the DCR Urban and Community Forestry Program. It may take 4-6 months for grants to be approved by DCR. If you need a no-cost extension, please contact [Julie Coop](mailto:julie.coop@mass.gov) 30-60 days prior to the grant end date.

**What are the reporting requirements for the grant recipient?**

At the mid-point of the grant period, the DCR Urban and Community Forestry program will visit the community to assess grant progress. Following completion of the grant, the grant recipient will be required to submit an Accomplishment Report Form.

**How will my community or organization be reimbursed?**

Documentation of all expenses and matching funds or in-kind services must be maintained. Please refer to the document Grant Reimbursement Guidelines DCR Urban and Community Forestry Challenge Grants for more information on record-keeping. At the conclusion of the project, contact Julie Coop to arrange a grant inspection. Following inspection, complete an Expense and Match Documentation Form, a Reimbursement Request Form for Planting Projects, or a Reimbursement Form for Non-planting Projects and submit applicable supporting documentation, along with the completed Accomplishment Report, to [Julie Coop](mailto:julie.coop@mass.gov).

The forms are available on our website: <https://www.mass.gov/how-to/submit-a-reimbursement-for-urban-and-community-forestry-grants> Upon approval, the reimbursement shall be issued through DCR.

**How will grants be evaluated and selected?**

An Evaluation Committee will score and rank the applications based on their relative strengths. The Committee will make recommendations on applications to the DCR Commissioner and the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs, who will make final determinations.

**The criteria for rating proposals include:**

1. Application is complete, detailed, and clearly presented.
2. Proposal will result in sustained improvements in local capacity for excellent urban and community forestry management in one or more of the areas identified above.
3. Project involves diverse members of the community in planning and implementation.
4. Budget and timeline are reasonable, accurate, and clearly presented.
5. Community is a Tree City USA community.
6. Applicant has not recently been funded through the DCR Urban & Community Forestry Challenge Grant program.

**Whom can we call with questions or to discuss a project?**

All potential applicants are encouraged to contact the DCR Office of Urban and Community Forestry to discuss potential projects. Applicants are more likely to be successful if they do so. This is especially important if you are considering an inventory, survey, or tree committee development activity.

Please contact:

Julie Coop, Urban and Community Forester, DCR Office of Urban and Community Forestry

Phone: 617-797-3392

Email: [julie.coop@mass.gov](mailto:julie.coop@mass.gov)

Mathew Cahill, Community Action Forester

Phone: 617-626-1464

Email: [mathew.cahill@mass.gov](mailto:mathew.cahill@mass.gov)



**Massachusetts DCR Urban and Community Forestry**

# Challenge Grant Application Intent to Apply

\*\*Submit the Intent to Apply form by e-mail to [Julie.Coop@mass.gov](mailto:Julie.Coop@mass.gov) no later than October 1\*\*

Environmental Justice 

Applicant (Entity Name):

**(***First-time applicant*)

Mailing Address:

Contact Person:

Phone:

Email:

Short Project Title:

Project Summary: **In the following space**, briefly describe the project, including what you expect to be developed, produced, performed, and/or implemented. The project must relate to urban and community forestry.

Please list any project partners:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Grant Request ($) + | Match ($) + | Volunteer Value ($) = | Total Project Cost |
| $ | $ | $ | $ |

Match (including volunteer value) should be equal or greater than the amount of grant funds requested for non-environmental justice projects.

Our community currently has (check as applicable):

 Citizen Tree advocacy group or non-profit with urban forestry area of focus

 Local ordinance or written policies that relate to urban forestry (in addition to MGL Ch. 87)

 Qualified Tree Warden (with natural resource degree, arborist certification, and/or Mass. Qualified Tree Warden)

 Urban Forestry Plan or urban forestry component of a Master or Open Space Plan

 Tree City USA designation

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Signature of Authorized Agent Date

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Printed Name and Title

**Email to:** [julie.coop@mass.gov](mailto:julie.coop@mass.gov)