



**Request for Proposals  
The Urban Forestry Climate Change Grants Program  
America the Beautiful / Yes We Can**

**Second Round of Applications – Due February 2, 2022**

The Connecticut Urban Forest Council is seeking proposals for its Urban Forestry Climate Change Grants Program. In addition to being based in **urban forestry activities**, projects that receive funding must also include goals relating to **climate change** and to **equity and environmental justice**. Community involvement, communications and a demonstration of commitment to the stewardship of the urban forest are also factors that will be considered in the review of these grant proposals.

The grant application process is open to 501(c)3 non-profits and municipalities within the State of Connecticut. The **maximum amount of each grant is \$37,000**. This is the second round of grant applications. These applications are due by February 2, 2022.

**Background and Introduction:**

This Urban Forestry Climate Change Grant Program has been created by the Connecticut Urban Forest Council (CUFC) at the request of the Commissioner of the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP). These grants are for the purpose of producing on-the-ground achievements that combine goals drawn from urban forestry, climate change and equity and environmental justice. This grant program is being funded by DEEP using the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI) as the funding source.

At the request of the Commissioner, this grant program has been developed so that it includes those elements of the Governor’s Council on Climate Change (GC3) Phase 1 Report<sup>1</sup> that relate to urban forestry along with the actions outlined in the DEEP Division of Forestry 2020 Forest Action Plan.<sup>2</sup> CUFC paid particular attention to the section on “The Equity Lens” in the GC3 Phase 1 Report (pages 19-27) and to the section on “Climate Change Threats to Vulnerable Populations” in the GCS Forest Sub-Group Final Report (pages 35-42).<sup>3</sup> Potential applicants may review these documents to gain a better understanding as to how climate change along with equity and environmental justice goals may relate to potential projects.

---

<sup>1</sup> [“Taking Action on Climate Change and Building a Resilient Connecticut for All”](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DEEP/climatechange/GC3/GC3_Phase1_Report_Jan2021.pdf) ( [https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DEEP/climatechange/GC3/GC3\\_Phase1\\_Report\\_Jan2021.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DEEP/climatechange/GC3/GC3_Phase1_Report_Jan2021.pdf) ) published January 2021

<sup>2</sup> [“Connecticut Forest Action Plan”](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DEEP/forestry/2020-CT-Forest-Action-Plan-FINAL-Submitted-for-Approval.pdf) ( <https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DEEP/forestry/2020-CT-Forest-Action-Plan-FINAL-Submitted-for-Approval.pdf> ) submitted December 2020

<sup>3</sup> [“Forest Sub-Group Final Report”](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DEEP/climatechange/GC3/GC3-working-group-reports/GC3_WNL_Forests_Final_Report_110620.pdf) ( [https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DEEP/climatechange/GC3/GC3-working-group-reports/GC3\\_WNL\\_Forests\\_Final\\_Report\\_110620.pdf](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DEEP/climatechange/GC3/GC3-working-group-reports/GC3_WNL_Forests_Final_Report_110620.pdf) ) submitted November 2020

In taking on this challenge, the CUFC recognizes that this grant program will be building off of the successful America the Beautiful grants provided through DEEP Forestry's Urban Forestry Program. That program traces its origins all the way back to the "America the Beautiful" Initiative begun in 1990 by President George H. W. Bush. The foundational concept in that initiative was the need to plant and maintain trees in urban areas, for the benefit of the people who live, work and play in those areas. CUFC seeks to add to the solid foundations of DEEP's America the Beautiful grant program by including efforts relating to climate change and environmental equity as epitomized by the administration of President Barack Obama. In that spirit, the CUFC has added the phrase "Yes We Can" to the formal grant program title.

**Purpose of the Grant Program:**

The purpose of the Urban Forestry Climate Change grant program is to fund projects at the local level that will:

- Enhance, increase or otherwise improve local tree canopy cover and/or create opportunities for increased benefits to be derived from the local tree canopy cover
- Reduce the effects of a changing climate, particularly at the local level, or contribute significantly towards mitigating factors that contribute to climate change
- Address equity issues and set environmental justice goals, with specific regards to the effects of climate change and the urban forest

Examples of the types of projects that the Connecticut Urban Forest Council (CUFC) is seeking to fund might include, but are not limited to:

- the planting of trees
- improving the management and maintenance of existing trees and/or wooded areas
- educational, outreach or planning efforts that can be shown will lead directly to improvements in local tree canopy cover and/or to increased access to the benefits provided by trees locally

These projects must include a demonstrated understanding either of the effects that climate change is expected to have or is having locally and how these climate change effects will impact those who live, work and/or play in the vicinity of the grant project, or how local actions are apt to have a significant influence on reducing the causes of climate change.

The following are examples of climate change effects that might be considered as part of the project:

- increasingly warming weather and the urban heat island effect
- increased flooding
- increasingly unsettled weather events
- the public health effects that might be exacerbated by a changing climate and/or
- ways in which the trees and the urban forest may reduce the demand for energy use

The project may also include considerations as to how climate change is apt to affect the urban forest itself, such as through changes in tree species or increases in invasive insects or plants.

Projects that favor the retention and maintenance of large and mature trees are encouraged, due the significant ecosystem services that are produced by these trees, including cooling, pollution reduction, and the provision of habitat for wildlife.

Approved projects must include goals that relate to equity and environmental justice concerns.

By equity, CUFC means a recognition of the disparities that exist in society in terms of living conditions, health outcomes, denial of opportunity and diverted political power, with particular reference as how those disparities have historically affected people of color, low-income communities, people with disabilities and other disadvantaged groups and individuals.

By environmental justice, CUFC means a recognition of how lack of equity has often affected people individually or as groups, in terms of access to natural resources such as clean air and clean water, outdoor spaces such as those used for recreation or other environmental benefits, or in terms of undue and excessive contacts with environmental hazards, such as pollutants or unsafe or unsanitary living conditions. Environmental justice also includes a commitment to improving conditions in a way that leads towards a more equitable and just outcome.

Many examples could be given of environmental justice concerns that relate to urban forestry. The following are two of those examples:

- tree plantings intended to reduce chronic community exposure to sources of air pollution by communities without adequate means of otherwise avoiding this exposure
- the development of safe and attractive hiking trails through a wooded area, to encourage active outdoor recreation and improved public health among groups without many other means of nearby outdoor access to nature

CUFC considers it important that the grant applications reflect the goals and concerns of the local community and, as appropriate, provide opportunities for local community involvement. A report from the community will be required as part of the completion of any approved grant.

Because the full benefits of urban forestry projects are often not reached for years after a project has been completed, consideration will also be given to the commitment of the grant recipients to ongoing engagement with and stewardship of the urban forest. For example, for tree planting projects, this would mean a demonstrated commitment to nurturing the growing trees and providing for their maintenance needs, at least through the five-year establishment phase.

While CUFC is seeking to provide guidelines for these projects, it is not seeking to limit the creativity of those who will apply for these grants. In fact, creativity is encouraged, as it broadens the understanding of the ways serious problems facing society and the environment today may be addressed.

#### **Specific Conditions and Requirements:**

- All grant recipients must either be a Connecticut municipality or be a 501(c)3 non-profit organization, as designated by the IRS. All grant projects must be within the State of Connecticut.
- Projects must be completed within the time frame determined through the project agreement. In no case will a grant recipient be considered for reimbursement for work done after July 1, 2023.

- The maximum amount awarded for each grant will be \$37,000. Applications may be for less than this amount, but not for more.
- In most situations, the grant funding will be provided to the recipients on the basis of reimbursements for expenses incurred. However, payments in advance of certain expenditures may be permissible, at the request of the recipient and as deemed appropriate by CUFC. The full release of grant funds will require the successful completion of the grant project.
- These awarded grant funds must not be more than 75% of the total value to the project. The total value includes the amount of the project value that comes from grant funds as well as any additional contributions. When totaling the amount of these additional contributions, funds from other sources and/or the value of in-kind services to be donated to the project should be included. This additional funding may include funds from other governmental sources, including federal funds, other state sources or other non-profit organizations. These additional contributions of value to the project, whether through additional funding or by contributed services, are collectively known as ‘match’. The sources of these matching values must be included as part of the application.
- With respect to equity and environmental justice goals, the review committee will give priority to those municipalities and census blocks included on DEEP’s list of Environmental Justice Communities.<sup>4</sup> All applicants may wish to review this list and the associated criteria in order to better understand the basis for these communities being so designated.<sup>5</sup> While listed communities will be given priority, it not intended that the list be exclusive.
- Because that list is not intended to be exclusive, CUFC is asking each applicant to describe how its project encompasses equity and environmental justice goals. Applicants should include a description, in equity and environmental justice terms, of the community or communities involved in the implementation of the project and of the community or communities most affected by the project.
- The extent to which a project may offset the local impacts of climate change and/or benefit people highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change will also be given specific consideration.<sup>6</sup>
- At the conclusion of each grant, with the cooperation of the grant recipients, CUFC will seek to describe and document the environmental gains and societal benefits derived from each grant. This will require good record-keeping throughout the life of the project. What constitutes these gains and benefits is, of course, project dependent. Examples of the sort of documentation sought might include:
  - Geo-location of trees planted and the increase in the urban forest canopy cover that these trees will bring (current and projected)
  - The number of people involved in the project and the number and/or extent of the communities that are benefitting from the project

---

<sup>4</sup> <https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Environmental-Justice/Environmental-Justice-Communities>. Listed on this page are both distressed municipalities and defined census blocks within other towns.

<sup>5</sup> The criteria for determining distressed communities in Connecticut has been developed by the state Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD). The list of these criteria are available at: [https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DECD/Research-Publications/Distressed\\_Municipalities/Distressed-municipality-criteria.doc](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DECD/Research-Publications/Distressed_Municipalities/Distressed-municipality-criteria.doc)

<sup>6</sup> “Vulnerability to Climate Change is often described as some combination of exposure, sensitivity and ability to respond, or adaptive capacity.” [Forests Sub-Group Final Report \(ct.gov\)](#) page 35

- Statements from people from communities involved in and affected by the grants regarding outcomes and benefits
  - The way in which the project mitigates the urban heat island effect along with information about the population that benefits from this mitigation (e.g., how many people?)
  - Extent in areal terms of invasive plant species eradicated and of native flora re-established
- At the conclusion of the grant program, CUFC will be publicizing a summary of the accomplishments of the grant program as a whole. As part of this effort, CUFC will request input from each of the grant recipients.
  - CUFC is also asking the grant applicants to look beyond the immediate timeframe of the proposed project and describe how the project will continue to have an impact on the community and on the local environment. Through this grant program, CUFC seeks to encourage a sense of stewardship and commitment towards the urban forest.

**Please Note:** CUFC will be highly committed to the success of each approved grant. As such, once a grant has been approved, CUFC will be willing to provide the advice and assistance of its membership throughout the life of the project, particularly as relates to technical support. To be in a position to provide this support, CUFC anticipates remaining in contact with each of the grant recipients regarding the project throughout the term of the grant.

### **The Application Process**

Applications will be made through [CUFC's Urban Forestry Climate Change Grants Program web page](#).<sup>7</sup> In addition to providing the link to the application form, this page also includes links to the key grant application materials. It also includes a link to a form through which potential applicants may ask questions regarding these grants of CUFC.

This is the second of two rounds of grant applications. **These second round grant applications will be due February 2, 2022**, with the expectation that those grants will be awarded by the end of March 2022. The goal for the conclusion of work for the second round of grants will be July 1, 2023.

### **Applicants must be either fully incorporated 501(c)3 organizations with the IRS or be municipalities.**

Applicants must fill out the **Application Form** included on the Urban Forestry Climate Change Grants web page and submit that form along with the other application materials to the CUFC by the application due date.

Applications will be reviewed by a committee assembled by CUFC. The committee will pass their recommendations for funding to the full CUFC for the Council's final approval.

### **Review of the Grant Applications:**

**Feasibility.** Before any grant application is considered for funding, the reviewers will first assess whether the proposed project is feasible. In order that this may be done, the reviewers require that

---

<sup>7</sup> <https://cturbanforestcouncil.org/grants/climate-change-grants/>

applicants submit a **Work Plan**, a **Budget**, a **Site Plan** and a **List of Tools and Materials**. This is all described in the [Application Instructions](#).<sup>8</sup> These Instructions are also linked off of the grant web page.

The reviewers will use these materials to view each proposed project in terms of the work outlined, the workforce, tools and other resources needed, the project time frame and the project budget.

Among the items relating to feasibility that the reviewers will consider are:

- Is the project clearly defined and presented in a manner that can be readily understood?
- Can the project be accomplished in the time and manner being proposed? Is there a clear timeline associated with the project?
- Is the work force for this project clearly defined and adequate?
- Are the individuals responsible for seeing the project through to completion clearly defined, in a way that establishes leadership and responsibility for each stage of the project as well as for the project as a whole?
- Is the budget appropriate for this project? Is the match clearly stated?
- Are the standards to be used to guide how the work is to be done specified? Are they the appropriate standards<sup>9</sup> for this work? Is there allowance for proper after-care where needed?
- Are the end products and expected outcomes of the grant clearly stated, in simple and straightforward terms?

The grant applicant must indicate what permissions will be needed for this project and how those permissions will be obtained. For example, if a tree planting project is to be done on municipal land by a non-profit organization, the grant applicant must describe how permission from the municipality will be obtained. It is not necessary that this permission be obtained prior to the grant being awarded, but these permissions must be obtained before work on the grant will be allowed to begin.

The Feasibility Review will take place after the due date for each round of grant applications. In a situation in which the grant application is determined to be not acceptable in terms of feasibility, the CUFC will return this application to the applicant with an explanation as to why this determination was made. If there is an opportunity for reconsideration of this application, in the next grant round or, if there are still funds available in the current round, then the applicant may submit an updated grant application for re-consideration. Such re-consideration should not be construed in any way as prior approval of this project.

Applications which the reviewers judge as being essentially feasible but in need of minor adjustments may be conditionally approved pending these minor changes. It shall be up to the judgment of the reviewers as to what constitutes a minor adjustment and whether these minor adjustments may be made as part of the review process.

---

<sup>8</sup> <https://cturbanforestcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/InstructionsCUFCClimateChangeGrant.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Grant recipients are expected to use accepted professional standards and guidelines. For example, tree planting projects should adhere to the guidelines presented in [the Connecticut Tree Owners Manual \(https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DEEP/forestry/CTTreeOwnersManualpdf.pdf?la=en\)](https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DEEP/forestry/CTTreeOwnersManualpdf.pdf?la=en). Where possible, the grant applicants should state the guidelines that will be followed.

**Final Review.** Any grant applications deemed to be feasible in terms of the work proposed will then be given further consideration as to how well they address the stated purpose of the grant program. Each of the following 4 Focus Areas of the project will be reviewed and scored according to the following matrix:

- Urban Forestry Goals – 25 points
- Climate Change Goals – 25 points
- Equity and Environmental Justice Goals – 25 points
- Community Involvement, Communications Efforts and Ongoing Stewardship – 25 points

Each applicant will be asked to provide a separate Goals Statement as to what is the intended outcome in connection with each of those 4 focus areas of the project. Details as to what the reviewers will be considering with regards to each of these focus areas is included in the Application Packet.

Once the projects have been scored according to the above matrix, they will be ranked. The Review Committee will then review final listing of projects and their scores. Based on those scores, the Committee will make a recommendation to the Council as a whole as to which projects to fund. It will be the responsibility of the Review Committee to break any ties in the ranking, should that be necessary. The final decision as to which grants to fund is the responsibility of the Council as a whole.

All of this is outlined in greater detail in the [Applications Instructions](#).