



How to Fund Community Forestry

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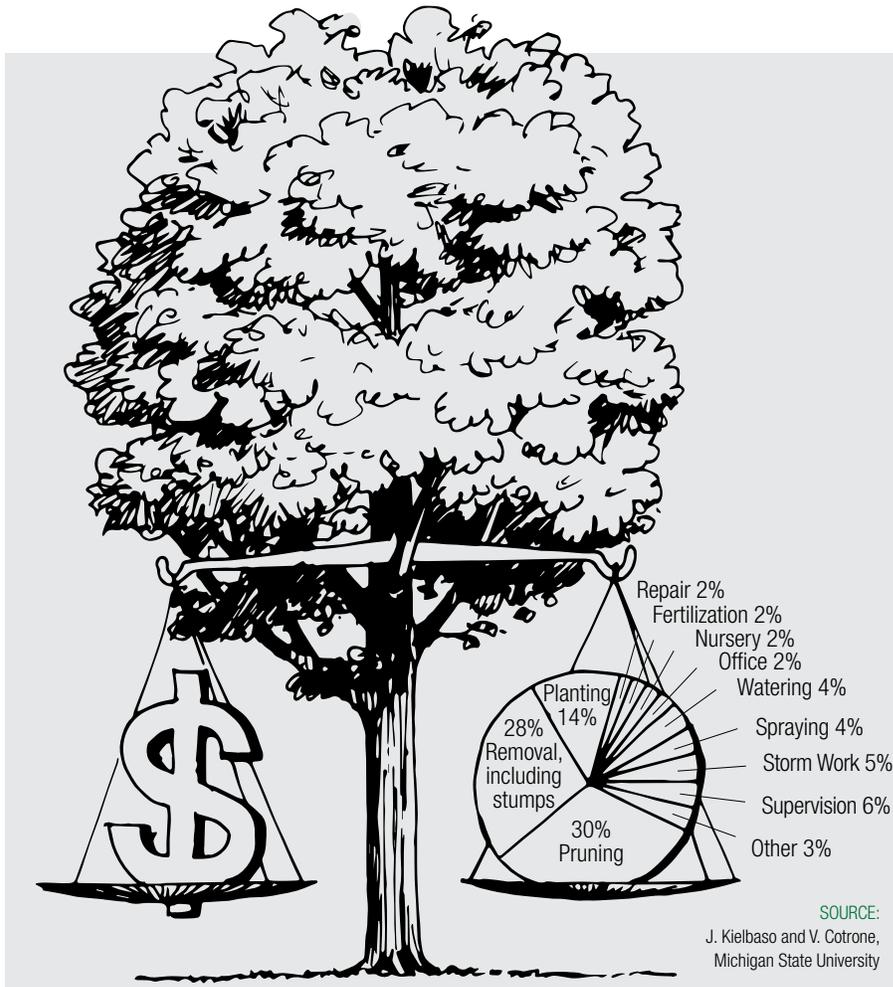
Community forestry programs require more than enthusiasm and dedication. They require technical skills, modern equipment, time, and materials — not the least of which is planting stock. All bear a cost. But throughout America, communities are finding ways to pay. Cost, or lack of money, should never be considered an impassable barrier to more trees and better care.

It has been said with eloquence, with statistics, and in words as plain as “there’s no free lunch.” Any way you look at it, there is no escaping the fact that all good things have a cost. Trees are no exception. If we want the benefits and the contributions that trees make in our communities, we must find ways to pay the price.

It has been estimated that municipalities with forestry programs spend between \$8 and \$11 per tree each year. The graph on this page developed by J. James Kielbaso and Vincent Cotrone of Michigan State University shows the array of expenditures necessary to protect a community’s green assets. The figures are for public trees only, including those on streets (61%) and in parks (26%), cemeteries (2%), city-owned nurseries (2%), and other public property (9%).

Kielbaso and Cotrone also estimated the total value of the nation’s street trees at some \$30 billion. Add to that the economic advantages of energy savings, pollution control, enhanced shopping areas, and higher property values, and it clearly illustrates the need for investing in tree care. On top of that we must plant more trees as cities expand and older trees die. In recent years, the U.S. Forest Service has documented the economic value of trees and calculated cost-benefit ratios for their planting and maintenance. For example, a study of the urban forest in Modesto, California, showed that for each dollar invested in the community’s trees, \$1.89 in benefits were returned to residents. To a greater or lesser degree, this favorable ratio has been found in cities throughout the country.

Regardless of how good the investment is in planting and caring for trees, it does cost money. Funds for these activities have never been overly abundant, but the situation has grown worse since the economic recession that began in 2008. Funding community forestry takes determination, public support, imagination, and hard work. Some suggestions for assistance are offered in the pages that follow.



SOURCE:
J. Kielbaso and V. Cotrone,
Michigan State University

Every community faces the problem of finding ways to balance income with the costs of tree care.

Federal Assistance for Urban Trees

In the world of trees, the 1990s will be remembered as a starting point for significant federal funding of urban and community forestry. Since then, changing administrations and national priorities have led to modifications in processes and programs, but currently support continues in various forms and is worth investigating. In addition, new legislation is introduced periodically that can affect funding for community forestry. Being attuned to and supportive of favorable bills should be part of the role for tree boards and others who understand the value of trees in our communities.

URBAN AND COMMUNITY FORESTRY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Thanks to a provision in the Food, Agriculture, Conservation, and Trade Act of 1990 ("Farm Bill"), state governments nationwide have received financial assistance to establish or strengthen community forestry programs. The funds enable the hiring of urban and community forestry coordinators and volunteer coordinators. They can also be passed along to local communities. When a state decides to do that, the grants usually require matching funds, but the local contribution can include administrative services, volunteer help, and donated trees. The funds cannot be used to substitute for funds normally supplied by the municipality.

Only a small percentage of funds from this source can be used to purchase planting stock. Nonetheless, the money has provided valuable assistance for on-the-ground improvements, public education, volunteer projects, and building a commitment to long-term urban forest management. Funded projects have included:

- Brochures and other materials for public education
- Interpretive facilities
- Arboretum planning and development
- Workshops and training programs
- Seed money for hiring city foresters
- Seed money to hire volunteer coordinators
- Tree inventories and plans
- Demonstrations and special events
- Tree board establishment

CONTACT: Urban and community forestry staff in your state forester's office



A PREMISE: THERE IS NO SUBSTITUTE FOR LOCAL SUPPORT

Ultimately, community trees are a local responsibility. Federal assistance, state assistance, donations, and special grants are currently providing important help for planting trees and establishing community forestry programs. But no source of funds should be considered a substitute for including tree replacement or care in local municipal budgets. Abundant, healthy trees are of value to the entire community. A forestry program is as much a municipal responsibility as streets and fire protection. Incorporating trees into the mainstream of municipal fiscal responsibility should be a goal in all strategic planning for the future of trees in America.

– John Rosenow
Arbor Day Foundation Founder

NATIONAL URBAN AND COMMUNITY FORESTRY ADVISORY COUNCIL

Another provision in the 1990 Farm Bill established the National Urban and Community Forestry Advisory Council. The Council reports directly to the Secretary of Agriculture. Among its projects are grants for specified purposes. The focus of these grants changes annually, but has included funding for such activities as demonstration and information relative to the environmental costs and benefits of urban forests, and the development of model municipal or volunteer urban forestry programs that serve under-represented, diverse publics.

CONTACT: U.S. Forest Service, Cooperative Forestry
P.O. Box 96090, Washington, DC 20090

RESOURCE CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT (RC&D) PROGRAMS

Here is a non-traditional source of assistance from an organization with an increasing interest in community forestry. RC&D councils are found throughout the United States. Technically, most are nonprofit corporations made up of local farmers, business leaders, and units of government to coordinate projects in primarily rural areas. The program is administered by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and receives professional support from that agency. Projects undertaken are the decision of each council. Some discretionary funds are usually available to assist, but the real opportunity is that RC&D is a highly flexible organization with personnel who are masters at putting together partnerships. They have an impressive record of securing grants and donations and meeting cost-sharing requirements for the projects they select. The key point, then, is to learn about the RC&D in your area and present a convincing case for community forestry needs. Even better, volunteer to become active on the council's forestry committee.

CONTACT: Your local USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service office

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

Some communities have been successful in obtaining significant funding related to urban forestry through provisions of the Clean Water Act, as administered by the Environmental Protection Agency. Grants under EPA's Nonpoint Source Pollution Program have included urban riparian restoration, farm filter strips, roadside erosion control, and similar efforts to protect water quality.

CONTACT: Your regional office of EPA, epa.gov/epahome/postal.htm

GATEWAY TO FEDERAL GRANT SOURCES

There is a good way to find out what grant money is currently available from the federal government. Visit grants.gov for information. This site allows you to search by key words, agency, and a number of other ways — and even to actually apply for some grants online.



Federal resources and other grants help, but long-term maintenance and other mainstays of community forestry must continue to rely on local tax dollars.

FEMA – THE HELP YOU DON'T WANT TO NEED!

The Federal Emergency Management Agency is an organization you don't want to have to deal with — but it is good to know about it when a storm strikes. FEMA is the branch of federal government that steps in after a disaster has been declared. Typically, tornadoes, floods, wildfires, and hurricanes bring FEMA to town.

Until 1996, FEMA helped many communities replace trees after natural disasters, including ice storms. Now, however, assistance is primarily for pruning and removal of hazardous trees created by the disaster and associated cleanup. For more complete information on what may be eligible for assistance, we suggest you contact FEMA, ideally before help is needed.

CONTACT: FEMA, fema.gov

Ten Steps to Successful Grant Proposals

“Let’s write a grant for it” has become almost standard when considering community tree projects. “Let’s write a grant proposal” would be more accurate. The challenge is to find a potential funding organization or individual and then persuasively propose your project for support. Here are some tips for making that effort a success.

1. RESEARCH – BE THOROUGH

The first obvious step is to search for government agencies, private foundations, corporations, or other entities that fund the kind of project you have in mind. Less obvious is the philosophical approach required. This is to view your project as a partnership with the funding source — not simply a potential fountain of dollars. Remember that funders are just as eager to find the right projects to support as you are to have the support. According to The Foundation Center, a nonprofit group has “the ideas and the capacity to solve problems, but no dollars with which to implement them. The foundations and corporations have the financial resources but not the other resources needed to create programs. Bring the two together effectively, and the result is a dynamic collaboration.”

So, the first step is to thoroughly understand the goals of the funder and plan your proposal accordingly. Read about how the organization was founded and why, determine what grants have been previously awarded (including typical amounts of money), and — if possible — get to know someone in the organization.

2. THE EXECUTIVE SUMMARY – USING THE ABC APPROACH

ATTRACTIVE. Make the executive summary appealing so the reader wants to see the details that follow. **BRIEF.** A busy person is going to look at this paragraph or page, probably along with a stack of others from competitors. He/she will appreciate brevity, especially if it is easy to quickly comprehend. **CLARITY** is the key. Include how the project coincides with the funder’s goals, the importance of the project, key points of how it will be accomplished, and enough information about your organization to show the people involved are competent and worthy.

3. THE NEED – PUT PERSUASIVE PSYCHOLOGY TO WORK

If the funder is not familiar with your field of activity, you will need to briefly explain it. For example, the funder may be interested in clean air or climate change, but not be familiar with the role that urban trees can play. You will need to provide the link.

Emphasize the *importance* of your project and how it can help solve a particular problem. Do not

whine about your organization’s need for money, but rather how the money will serve others. Support your presentation with verifiable facts, examples, and possibly quotes by respected authorities. Subtly show how your good work will tie in nicely with the funder’s goals or purpose.

4. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES – BE SPECIFIC

This can be very concise and even in outline form. It should summarize in a sentence or two the goal, or end result, of your proposed project. Beneath that you itemize specific objectives that will help you reach that goal. This is not a “to-do list,” but rather a list of intended outcomes. Example:

PROJECT GOAL: To have all young children in our community introduced to nature through hands-on, safe, enjoyable experiences. In turn, this will lead to personal growth and pleasurable memories, help dispel “ecophobia,” and create long-term support for sustainable, environmental practices.

OBJECTIVES:

- a. To have at least 12 instructors qualified by next fall to use research-supported by methods for working effectively with preschool children in outdoor settings.
- b. To have a Nature Explore Classroom operational by fall of the next year.

Experts say that a good objective will be specific, measurable, attainable, and realistic. It should also mention when the objective will be accomplished unless a detailed schedule is included in a separate section of the proposal.

5. PROJECT METHODS – THE ‘HOW-TO’ PART

Now the detail. What exactly do you propose doing in order to carry out the partnership with the funder and meet the project goals and objectives? Essentially, this is your “to-do list.” It should clearly go step by step through what you propose doing, why the methods or approach are the best way to proceed, and what training, equipment, or materials will be needed. This section will probably only be read if the funder is interested. He/she should not be left guessing about any part of the process, and it should appear logical and doable.

6. EVALUATION – WHAT DOES ‘SUCCESS’ LOOK LIKE?

This is the part of a project most people don't like or don't do! It needs to occur after the project and that is when the excitement is over and workers are burned out. Nonetheless, funders want evidence that their money was well spent. They want to be able to include impressive results in their annual report or publicity. Therefore, it is important to include how you are going to assess the project when completed. This might include things like:

- Number of users
- Number of trees planted
- Survival rates
- Volunteers recruited or partnerships developed
- Number of people trained
- Reactions of officials
- Measurable effects on users
- Focus group reactions
- Surveys to be conducted

7. OTHER FUNDING SOURCES – WHO ELSE IS PREPARED TO ASSIST?

It helps to show that other partners have confidence in your project, but not to the point that your potential funder might get the idea that additional support is not necessary. Here is where you would show challenge grants and matching funds or in-kind contributions (volunteer hours included).

8. YOUR ORGANIZATION – WHY YOU CAN BE TRUSTED

Without overtly bragging, you need to succinctly sell yourself. Briefly and convincingly describe:

- Your history and mission
- An appendix showing your organizational structure, board of directors, tree board members, or however your organization is administered
- Who you serve
- The kind of projects or programs previously accomplished — and how they were successful and effective. In other words, your impressive track record.

NOTE: The recommendations on these pages are for requests going to corporations or foundations. Government grant applications usually have a specific format and/or forms that must be completed exactly as specified.

9. BUDGET – THE BOTTOM LINE

Unless the potential funder has a prescribed format for the budget portion of your request, the following items are traditionally included. A left-hand column might show expenses, and a right-hand column might show the in-kind or other contributions. Importantly, this page should be neat and clear so it can be reviewed and understood almost at a glance.

- Direct costs
- Personnel, including fringe benefits
- Equipment
- Supplies
- Travel
- Contingency (keeping this small!)
- Indirect, or overhead if any

10. THE IMPORTANT ‘EXTRAS’ – COVER LETTER AND APPENDICES

It is a good idea to do these last. Direct the cover letter to an appropriate, specific individual. It should be a brief introduction to the project and your organization, but not a rehash of the contents or executive summary. It should be brief, friendly and business-like. It sets the tone or presents the initial impression, and should make it clear that you understand the organization to which the request is being directed.

Appendix items might include maps or drawings, newspaper clippings, organizational charts, nonprofit verification, or other pertinent materials that would interrupt the flow of the proposal if included in the main body of the document.



Local Funding: The Essential Foundation

“Trees are something we can’t do without. They need to be viewed as essential infrastructure along with streets, utilities, and crime prevention. A sustainable tax base is a must.”

– James Nighswonger
Retired Urban and Community Forestry Program Leader, Kansas

TAXES AND THE BUDGET

Local taxes must be at the heart of support for community forestry. Trees serve important local needs and should be viewed as an essential service. Everyone who cares about trees must work together to ensure that this concept is reflected in municipal government and results in an adequate amount budgeted each year as a line item.

PER DOLLAR PROJECT SUMMARY

Water main	\$.245
Pavement	.223
Storm sewer	.167
Sanitary sewer	.130
Sidewalk	.074
Curb/gutter	.059
Light	.043
Turn	.037
Trees	.022
Total	\$ 1.00

MAKING THE MOST OF TAX DOLLARS

The city of Milwaukee has set a good example of how trees can be even more than a “line item” in a municipal budget. This is by making trees part of all street and road improvement projects. Using this approach, a project tally may look something like this, with trees being an essential — but relatively inexpensive — part of the project.

ASSESSMENTS AND COMPENSATIONS

About a dozen cities in Ohio, both large and small, fund their street tree programs with a special assessment on all properties abutting public rights-of-way. This assessment, similar to that which funds sidewalk repair, is authorized by Ohio Revised Code Section 727.011. Check your state’s codes to see if you have something similar. Cincinnati, through an 18-cent-per-foot assessment, generates about \$1.6 million per year, which is restricted for use on trees along its 1,000 miles of streets.

Assessments are supplemented with compensatory payments made by people who damage or remove street trees, either by accident or by design. The amount of compensation is determined using the appraisal formula sanctioned by the International Society of Arboriculture (See Bulletin No. 28) and the money is given directly to the city forestry department for planting trees.

STATE AND LOCAL TREE TRUSTS

Every state and community should have a tree trust. This is essentially a fund that can accept private and commercial donations earmarked for tree programs. At its best, the principal is invested and never spent, with the interest used for projects and when matching money is needed for a cost-share grant. It is a method of raising funds that appeals to people who want to maximize the benefits of their donation over time. Publicity about the trust can suggest cash donations, insurance policies, property for sale, and bequests.

Sometimes trusts are established by individuals and committees for parks or general use, then forgotten as the years pass. Check with your city treasurer and local bank officials for information about existing or potential trusts.

TAX CHECKOFFS AND LICENSE PLATES

More than 60 percent of all states now let taxpayers donate from their tax refunds or add to their tax payment. Wildlife interests were first to note this and special license plates as revenue sources. Using the tax checkoff method, Minnesota has raised more than \$1 million a year for its nongame wildlife program. Now some urban forestry programs are taking advantage of these opportunities. For example, New Jersey’s “Treasure Our Trees” license plate raised \$70,000 in less than two years after it began.

UTILITY BILL DONATIONS

From Austin, Texas, to Shelby, Ohio, another “painless” way is being used to let citizens donate to ensure trees for the future. In some cases, a specific amount (15 cents, for example) is added to each utility bill. If a resident wants to pay, he/she voluntarily includes it in the payment.

Another method is to ask bill payers to round the amount due to a higher figure of their choice. Thousands of dollars are raised this way and used for special tree projects. All it takes is the cooperation of your local utility.



Trees in memorial or dedicated to outstanding individuals offer a good way to garner donations to help with tree planting.

MEMORIALS AND HONORS

At times of loss and times to celebrate, the question is often: How do we best remember special people? Many leaders of tree boards, arboretums, institutions, and cemeteries have devised a way to help local residents while at the same time funding tree

planting. Details vary, but there is usually a tastefully designed brochure that explains the policies and presents the costs of a tree and sometimes a plaque or monument to go with it. Including a list of species will prevent wrong choices and help meet planting plans. In all cases, personal follow-up is important when an inquiry is received. Care of such donated trees is also essential to avoid disappointment and poor public relations. This method has led to the planting of thousands of trees throughout the country.



BAKE SALES, AUCTIONS ...

Raising funds is limited only by the imagination. One city “sells” public rest benches with engraved labels. The benches are sawn from street tree removals. Other cities sell firewood or even lumber. Volunteers set up tables at fairs and

shopping malls to sell perennial bulbs, cookies, trees, you name it. A cleaning establishment donates \$0.01 per hanger returned, gaining from it great publicity, a way to recycle hangers and gain dollars for trees. And in England, The Financial Times lined up more than 50 famous artists and personalities to donate paintings, drawings, sculptures, or photographs of “my favorite tree” for an auction. Funds went to the Countryside Commission to plant trees east of London.

TO STRETCH DOLLARS

Communities nationwide are finding innovative ways to maximize limited funds to support tree programs. Here are some ideas that might work for you, too.

- **SHARED RESOURCES.** Two or more small communities can share the funding and services of a community forester. Other contracted services and equipment purchases can also be obtained in this way.
- **ADOPT-A-TREE.** An appeal is made to residents to support the care or planting of specific trees. A catchy title for the program can help. For example, one community called this program Feed the Oaks. In this case, there were 199 live oaks in the city identified for the program. Contributions paid for their fertilizing and care.
- **FREE PLANTING.** Using this system, the city purchases trees or grows them to 1.5-inch caliper. Residents and organizations apply for the trees and suggest planting locations. The sites are then checked by the city forester and 1,000 lucky recipients are selected each spring to do the planting and watering.
- **COST SHARING.** When a resident wants to plant a street tree in an empty planting site, the resident pays half the cost of the tree and the city pays the other half. By agreement, either party can do the planting and initial care.
- **UTILITY ASSISTANCE.** In many communities, cooperation with a local utility makes tree planting inexpensive through either cost-sharing or the utility planting the tree at no cost to the city or resident. The advantage to the utility, besides good publicity, is that it can control species selection and make certain that low-maturing trees are planted beneath or near overhead lines.
- **ORGANIZATIONS.** Fraternal organizations, churches and other civic-minded organizations often look for worthwhile projects. Contacting these groups has proved very fruitful for having street and park trees planted at no cost to the city.
- **CONTROLLING SPECIES.** In the long run, costs can be kept down by planting the right tree in the right place. To help with this, some communities supply printed tags to local nurseries to place on trees for sale. The tags explain planting needs such as soil space requirements, limitations on height if near wires, etc. Mass media is used to warn about prohibited species or species prone to local insects, ice damage, or other threats to longevity.

Alliance for Community Trees



With more than 90 percent of Americans living and working in towns and metropolitan areas, the need for informed action on a local level is greater than ever.

The Arbor Day Foundation's Alliance for Community Trees network is composed of community-based organizations dedicated to planting and caring for trees. These passionate nonprofits are the boots on the ground — the purest and best definition of grass roots. Their hands are in the dirt; their impact is undeniable. And as a unified force, they are changing towns and cities across the country.

This network provides a strong, collective voice for community forestry, provides cost-effective training, and facilitates networking and the sharing of ideas. Importantly, it has also been able to form major partnerships that provide funding to be passed along to communities in the form of grants, providing the stimulus for organizing volunteers and planting thousands of trees where they are badly needed. These efforts have also generated support for community forestry through partnerships not only with other conservation organizations, but those not usually associated with trees, such as affordable housing groups and community development personnel.



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