No man is an island, and neither is anyone who wants to initiate or improve community forestry. Success today depends on collaboration and partnerships. Engaging others is essential for tree boards, city foresters, or any individual or group that champions the cause of tree planting and care.

The Theory of Engagement

Most advocates for urban forestry are action-oriented people. Conceptual ideas don’t turn the crank! Actually planting trees or instructing others about things like tree preservation or hazard reduction are more to their liking. However, in order to get entire communities engaged in what we know to be good urban forestry, an overview of some findings from social science may be helpful. Applying this or borrowing ideas from examples in the full bulletin will differ depending on your circumstances. However, the concept of using engagement tools to advance a project, program, or plan can be employed by everyone from a city forester or commercial arborist to interested citizens with a passion for trees.

ARTICULATE THE MESSAGING TRIANGLE

All action begins with an idea. Knowing in your own mind or within your organization what you want to achieve is one thing, and it is an important start. However, being able to clearly express it before you begin working on a campaign to achieve it will help ensure success. Paul Ries, Oregon’s Urban & Community Forestry Coordinator, uses the Messaging Triangle to do this. In short, each side of the triangle is essential, so be able to define exactly what these are in your case.

THE MESSAGE:

What is your goal or your objectives?
What is it you want to achieve?
Write it down.

Weak: To improve urban forestry (Too general)
Better: To gain a Tree City USA award for my city or to obtain and plant trees where none exist on Sylvacated Ave.

THE COMMUNICATION — DELIVERING THE MESSAGE

Create a plan, including who will contact the potential partners, the best approach (phone, face-to-face, letters, email), an effective appeal (such as mutual benefits or the need for help), and a timetable.

– Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

POTENTIAL PARTNERS
(Strategic individuals or groups)

Brainstorm and make a list.
(Omissions can lead to unintended offense.)

Examples:
• Garden Club
• Respected city council member
• Neighborhood associations
• Other environmental NGOs
• City official responsible for trees
• Scouts or youth organizations