



DELAWARE FOREST SERVICE URBAN AND COMMUNITY FORESTRY PROGRAM

2026 TREE PLANTING & TREE MANAGEMENT GRANT REQUIREMENTS Municipalities, Homeowners Associations, Communities, Non-Profit Organizations

*** This year's grant application will be entirely [online](#) ***

I. GRANT PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

- Increase urban tree canopy in Delaware by promoting quality tree planting and management projects.
- To diversify, enhance, and promote the proper stewardship of Delaware's urban forest resources.
- To encourage sustainable urban and community forestry programs throughout Delaware.
- Promote green infrastructure that will improve storm water management.
- To improve air quality through urban forest management practices.
- Promote diversity, equity, inclusion, in tree canopy improvement efforts

Grant funds can help communities develop an effective urban and community forestry program through the following types of projects:

- **Tree planting** (urban forest buffers, street trees and open space plantings) [or](#)
- **Tree management** (professionally developed tree inventories, tree pruning, or hazardous tree removal)

II. GRANT RULES

APPLICANT AND LOCATION

1. Eligible projects must be performed on public lands within the community. Public lands are lands owned by state, county, or local governments along with lands classified as public open space within Municipalities, Homeowners Associations (HOA's), Maintenance Corporations (MC's), etc. Public lands include parks, green-ways, recreation areas, and public rights-of-way* or easements.

* Please refer to community development plans to note if a tree planting project falls within a right-of-way. If so, please contact the proper authority to receive approval before submitting this application. Failure to do so may result in application not being ranked and disqualified.

2. Applicants **must** have an Employer Identification Number (EIN) – no payment will be made to individuals.
3. Applications should be received from the community representative, such as board members. Applications will NOT be accepted if submitted by property management companies or contractors on behalf of the community.
4. **All** applicants are **required** to set up a site visit with Urban and Community Forestry Program (U&CF) staff, council, or partners **before** submitting the application. This allows the applicant to present their project to U&CF program staff and get answers to any questions the applicant may have about the application process. The [Site Visit Request Form](#) can be found on our website at de.gov/delawaretrees.
 - Site visits **must** be scheduled a minimum of a week in advance.
 - Appointments will be made on a first-come, first-served basis.
 - Final day to make an appointment will be February 6, 2026.
 - No site visits will be done after February 13, 2026.

5. All applications **must** be submitted **online**.
 - Applications will open December 5, 2025.

- Deadline to submit application online is February 27, 2026, by 4:30 p.m.
 - Grant status letters will go out by March 18, 2026.
 - Deadline to complete project and submit Grant Summary Report is November 30, 2026.
6. Applications for hazard tree removal **must** have tree(s) evaluated by a certified arborist and **deemed** hazardous to qualify for funds. Any tree removed must be replaced by the applicant at its own expense. The replaced tree must be shown prior to reimbursement of grant award.
 7. Tree pruning projects must be performed by a certified arborist. The arborist certification number (person performing the work) must be provided on the bid.
 8. The urban and community forestry grant is a reimbursement grant. No funding will be provided ahead of the project completion and DFS will not pay contractors directly. No project can take place ahead of application approval.

FUNDING AND CONTRACT

1. Applicants may submit **no more** than one (1) project for the 2026 grant cycle: either one planting **or** one management grant application may be submitted.
2. Urban and Community Forestry grants **are not** intended to provide ongoing funding. Funds will not be awarded to communities who have received the grant three years consecutively. This is a competitive grant process; we encourage applicants to formulate ways to include a line in their HOA budget that aids in the improvement of your urban forest.
3. Please provide **three original bids on contractor's company letterhead** for the grant project showing the itemized costs of materials and/or services for the project being applied for. Bid provided to applicant electronically in the form of an email from the vendor with species and pricing will also be accepted.
 - Planting bids must have correct species, count of species being planted, and price per species as requested.
 - Pruning & Removal bids must list species being pruned/removed, number of species being pruned/removed, and price per pruning/removal as requested.
4. Appendix A must be signed by the contractor and/or volunteer organization, HOA Board president, or municipal representative upon submission of the grant application. be provided to the contractor when requesting bids, along with a copy of the U&CF Grant Guidelines.
5. In the event that work is found to be inconsistent with U&CF or ANSI standards, the Delaware Forest Service reserves the right to suspend approved project work. The Contractor/Board shall be responsible for correcting all deficiencies prior to resuming work and before any payments are made.
6. Trees from the Delaware Forest Service's [Recommended Trees List](#) are encouraged if you are applying for a tree planting grant, though this is not a comprehensive list. (Updated list coming soon)
 - Other species may be used; however, they should be non-invasive and site-appropriate according to Arbor Day Foundation's ["Right Tree, Right Place"](#) guidelines.
 - Species diversity is encouraged by the U&CF Council: planting all trees of one species is not recommended.
 - Grant recipients may be subject to conditional award if the U&CF Council recommends a change in the tree species selection.
7. Soil analysis is required for approved applications. Kits can be requested from University of Delaware or AgroLab. Follow the instructions in the kit for proper soil collection.
8. Grant requests must be a minimum of \$500 not to exceed \$5,000.

MATCHING FUNDS

1. Applicants must show how requested funding will be matched in cash or in-kind (volunteer hours).

2. Match can be a combination of either “cash” or “in-kind” services that equals **50% of total project cost or 100% of total requested funds**. See examples at the end of document.
3. Matching funds **must not include** either federal funds or any assistance provided by the Delaware Forest Service.

Qualifications for Match:

- **In-kind service** is the time volunteers donate to the project. Examples of “in-kind” services that can be used are site prep, planting of the trees, watering of the trees, and meetings about the project.
- Planning and Tree Board meetings must not exceed 25% of in-kind match.
- Match must take place **during** the grant cycle: October 1, 2025 to November 30, 2026.
- Match must be directly part of the tree planting or maintenance project – no mowing, playground equipment, etc.
- Grantees must use the Delaware Forest Service [In-Kind Volunteer Tracker](#) sheet when submitting in-kind match at the end of the project. **No other** match sheets will be accepted.
- The 2026 volunteer labor rate is \$34.79 per hour. (Total volunteer hours x \$34.79 = In-kind match)
- Inventory grants **can only match** using **cash**.

IMPORTANT NOTES

- If the grant is approved, the Grantee will be required to sign a contract between the Delaware Forest Service and the Grantee which indicates mutual agreement to specific tree work.
- No materials or work may be purchased or performed until the Grantee signs a contract with the Delaware Forest Service. The contract will be provided after the grant is awarded.
- Miss Utility (1-800-282-8555) **MUST** locate all underground utilities for all planting projects. This is required before site visits to ensure DFS can recommend the best planting locations. (Miss Utility locate required for planting projects only)
- **Any** alterations or changes after the contract is signed **must first be approved** by the Delaware Forest Service.
- In the event that work is found to be inconsistent with U&CF or ANSI standards, the Delaware Forest Service reserves the right to suspend approved project work. The Contractor/Board shall be responsible for correcting all deficiencies prior to resuming work and before any payments are made.
- Projects and close out documents not completed by the applicant and received by the Delaware Forest Service before November 30, 2026, will result in loss of grant award and reallocation of funds. **No exceptions**. This is a firm deadline.
- A 3-year guarantee watering contract by a contractor is required to be accompanied with closeout documentation in order to be paid out (this is not part of this grant or any grant in the future and *shall* not be reimbursed).
- This is a reimbursement grant. Reimbursement will occur after project completion, the Grantee provides proof of paid invoices, matching funds, and a successful audit by the Delaware Forest Service.
- **Please note:** A **professional** shall conduct all inventories for the tree management grant and match must be **cash** only.
- No payments can be made during the month of July due to Delaware State fiscal year close-outs. Please consider this when submitting invoices and match; payments may be delayed if submitted around the month of June.
- **Communities may be reimbursed UP TO the awarded amount. (Awarded amount will be stated on the contract. Supporting invoice documents provided at the end of the project will determine total reimbursement amount. Final project cost may differ from proposed project cost.)**
- Tree mortality within the first three years of planting, notice must be given to the appropriate U&CF staff. When replanting occurs, tree species and pictures of replacement trees must be provided to U&CF staff. If the three-year mortality rate exceeds 50%, the community may become ineligible for future grant funding.

APPLICATION DEADLINE

Applications must be submitted by February 27, 2026 at 4:30 p.m.

III. EVALUATION CRITERIA

All grants will be ranked by the U&CF Council based on their project criteria and how it relates to each section in the application. Some of the grant scoring criteria are listed here.

APPLICANT:

- a. Tree Friendly status
- b. Tree City status
- c. First time applicant

PROJECT:

- c. Addresses proper storm water management practices, forested buffers
 - d. Helps develop sustainable urban and community forestry programs
 - e. Enhances and promotes proper stewardship (protecting, pruning, watering)
 - f. Helps sustain or maintain urban tree canopy
 - g. Promotes tree management planning or proper tree care
 - h. Creation of tree inventory
 - i. Trees for afforesting open community spaces
 - j. "Right tree, right place" (site-appropriate species consideration)
- Priority will be given to first-time applicants, Tree Friendly Communities (HOA's), Tree Cities (Municipalities), and projects with a focus on promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion.

IV. RECIPIENTS OF GRANT FUNDS

- Will receive a letter of congratulations and procedural guidelines by March 18, 2026.
- Will sign a contract with the Delaware Forest Service, stipulating that the project will be conducted as specified in the grant application along with any amendments. **No materials or work may be purchased or performed without a signed contract with the Delaware Forest Service.**
- Will be required to submit an updated Online W9 Form to allow your organization to receive grant funds from the State of Delaware. <https://esupplier.erp.delaware.gov> before signing the contract. **Verification must be received from the communities no later than 14 days after receiving the award letter.**
- Press releases, articles, newsletters, signage, etc. must contain the following wording: **Funding for this project was provided by the Delaware Forest Service Urban and Community Forestry Program.** Failure to use the above statement will result in reallocation of funding and/or repayment of issued funds.
- MUST provide a 7-day notice prior to project start date. This notice ensures that a Forest Service representative can be present at the time of event. Failure to provide 7-day notice can jeopardize the level of funding awarded.
- Will complete the project **and** submit an online Summary Report form by November 30, 2026. **No late submission of invoices and summary reports will be accepted. Late paperwork will result in loss of the grant award and reallocation of funds.**
- Closeout documentation must be submitted using the online form. No email submissions will be accepted. The link to the online form will be provided at the time of the 7-day notice. A 3-year guarantee watering contract by a contractor is required to be accompanied with closeout documentation in order to be paid out (this is not part of this grant or any grant in the future and *shall* not be reimbursed).

- After closeout documents are provided, an audit will be conducted by the Delaware Forest Service to ensure the project was completed properly and to the scope of work that was on the approved application and the signed appendix.
- The grantees are required to pass a final audit which adheres to the approved scope of work, U&CF standards on Appendix A, and the ANSI standards.
- Audits that identify issues must be brought into compliance to U&CF standards prior to December 19, 2026, in order to receive full grant funding.
- Will receive approved reimbursement amount upon completion of project, submission of Summary Report and documentation, finalized site plan and passing of the audit.
- Will notify U&CF staff of any tree replacements that take place within three years after grant planting project. If the three-year mortality rate exceeds 50%, the community may become ineligible for future grant funding.

V. 2024 TREE PLANTING AND MANAGEMENT APPLICATION OUTLINE

SECTION 1: COMMUNITY INFORMATION

1. Community Name *
2. Location of Community (county and, city or town)
3. Federal EIN *

SECTION 2: PROJECT CONTACTS

4. Project Leader *
5. Project leader phone number for contact purposes *
6. Project leader email *
7. Mayor or HOA President name
8. Mayor or HOA President contact email
9. Community Official name
10. Community Official contact email

SECTION 3: PROJECT DESCRIPTION

11. Project name *
12. Project start date *
13. Estimated project end date *
14. Description of specific project for which you are requesting funding*
15. Number of trees planted and species; or inventoried*

Tree Planting Criteria

- Species selection and why
 - a. What species are best for your goals?
 - b. Will the tree grow and cause a conflict in time?
 - c. Species selected size appropriate.
- Site conditions for project area
 - a. What conditions will the trees have to deal with: wet, periodic flood, compaction etc.
- Diversity of tree selection
 - a. Selecting several species to be planted instead of a singular one
 - b. Consideration of diversifying in case pests and diseases become present in the area.

16. Early tree maintenance

- Tree planting projects must include a 3-year plan for how the tree(s) will be managed and cared for, including protection, watering, and mulching in accordance with the [U.S. Forest Service's Tree Owner's Manual](#) or International Society of Arboriculture Best Management Practice (ANSI Z60.1 and A300).
- Please use the following as ideas to touch upon:
 - a. Who will be tending to the trees?
 - b. When will mulching occur thereafter?
 - c. How often will they be mulched?
 - d. How will watering happen during summer?
 - e. Monitoring of the tree's health and addressing issues.
 - f. Ensuring the contractor plants trees to ANSI standards mentioned above.
 - g. Will the trees be properly mulched after installation?
 - h. Ensure trees have at least one-year warranty as well as details for replacements.

SECTION 4: PROJECT FINANCIAL SUMMARY

This section is where you will indicate how your community will match the value you have requested for this grant.

- The applicant must state how it will match grant funds in cash or in-kind (volunteer hours)
- Each U&CF project must have 100% match either in cash or in-kind of the total project cost. (Minimum match requirement can be calculated by multiplying by 1). See example at the end of this document for more information.
- **In-kind:** Volunteer hours times the current volunteer wage (\$34.79 hour) For example 150 volunteer hours x 34.79 = \$ 5,218.50 of in-kind match.
- **Cash:** For example, a community can pay \$5,000 and request \$5,000 for a total project cost of \$10,000. Total project must be double the request amount: \$5,000 request must have at least \$10,000 in total for project, meaning that is \$5,000 in match and the grant will reimburse \$5,000 if awarded.

17. Grant funding requested (not to exceed \$5000) *

18. Cash match amount

19. Cash match description

20. In kind volunteer hours

21. In kind volunteer match value

22. In kind match description

23. Total match

* a required field on the formal application

SECTION 5: COST ESTIMATES

24. Uploading three (3) bids in PDF and DOC form.

- Provide three original bids for the specific project expenses on company letterhead. These bids need to be itemized. These bids may be from local nurseries, contractors, tree companies, etc.

SECTION 6: APPENDIX A

25. Upload copies of signed appendix either from contractor or HOA board acknowledging and agreeing to U&CF planting standards.

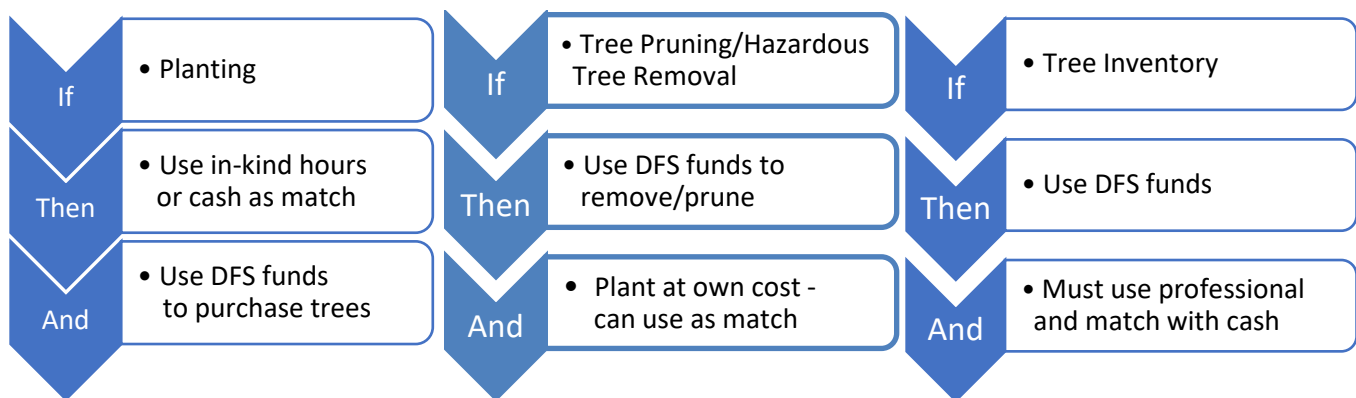
SECTION 7: SITE MAP AND LOCATION

26. Upload site map of where the project will take place with details of location and species.

- Include a map of your community showing the location(s) involved in the grant work. (Computer generated maps are most helpful. No hand drawn maps will be accepted)
- Mark tree locations and include the details on the work that will take place.
- Make a list of the street address of each tree and tree species. OR Mark tree species on map with indicated spots for planting or management.

To upload the document, click the upload prompt in the site map section of the online application and look for the file you need to upload for the attachment. Click “open”.

GUIDELINES FOR ALLOCATING URBAN TREE PROJECT GRANT FUNDS



Match Examples

1) **CASH MATCH:** 50% of total project cost

Example:

- Total cost of trees plus professional planting is \$3,000
- Grant request is \$1,500
- Organization pays total bill in cash = \$3,000
- Organization receives \$1,500 from UCF Program as a reimbursement.

2) **IN-KIND MATCH:** 100% of requested amount

Example:

- Total cost of trees is \$5,000
- Grant request is \$5,000 (maximum allowed)
- Organization contributes \$5,000 of in-kind services to the project: 45 volunteers contribute 3.75 hours each at a rate of \$34.79 = \$5,870.81 in match.
- Organization pays vendor for the cost of the trees = \$5,000
- Organization receives \$5,000 from UCF Program as a reimbursement.

3) **COMBINATION MATCH:** any total of cash and in-kind services that is **at least 50% of the total project cost or 100% of requested grant funds.**

Example:

- Total cost of trees plus professional planting is \$8,000

- b. Grant request is \$4,000
- c. Organization pays contractor = \$8,000
- d. Organization matches \$3,000 in cash plus 33 volunteer hours at \$34.79 per hour = \$1,148.07
- e. Organization receives \$4,000 in reimbursement from UCF Program.

Definitions

Cash Match

The most common type of match, and the easiest to track, is cash match. Cash match is either the grantee organization's own funds (general revenue) or cash donations from non-federal third parties (e.g. partner organizations), or by non-federal grants. A cash match contribution is an actual cash contribution.

In-Kind Match

In-kind match is the value of personnel, goods, and services directly related to the grant project. Grantees and third parties simply need to document the contributed resource of value. For example, the 2026 volunteer labor rate is \$34.79 per hour. (Total volunteer hours x \$34.79 = In-kind match).

Failure to meet match requirements will mean receiving less than the full amount requested.

Any questions regarding the 2026 grant applications process should be directed to:

Taryn Davidson
Urban Program Coordinator
Delaware Forest Service
Taryn.Davidson@delaware.gov

Jae'lynn Combs
Urban Outreach Coordinator
Delaware Forest Service
Jaelynn.Combs@delaware.gov

APPENDIX A

URBAN & COMMUNITY FORESTRY PLANTING STANDARDS

Urban & Community Forestry (U&CF) recommends the use of these standards and in part the ANSI A300 (Part6)-2012 Planting Standard where indicated.

Shall: As used in this standard denotes a mandatory requirement.

Should: As used in this standard denotes an advisory recommendation.

Nursery Stock: Trees *shall* be grade A stock, have good branching and root structure. Appropriate root ball size per tree caliper. No wounds on trunks or branches and *shall* be insect and disease free. Trees with poor pruning cuts, flush cuts or branch stubs will not be excepted. Trees with bamboo stakes attached to the trunk will not be excepted if the tree cannot remain upright when the bamboo stake is removed.

Planting Hole: Planting hole *shall* be no less than 1.5 times the diameter of the root ball. ANSI 64.4.4 p.15. The depth of the planting hole measurement *shall* be taken from the root ball by measuring from the bottom of the *trunk flare (root collar)* to the bottom of the root ball. ANSI 64.4.2 p. 15. To find the trunk flare pull away soil or planting mix at the base of the tree's trunk to expose the trunk flare. If planting hole was dug too deep refill with soil from planting hole and tamp to compaction until the proper planting depth is reached. Planting holes dug with an auger or mechanical tree spade can cause glazing of the soil on the sides of the planting hole. It is best to break up the glazed surfaces by using a shovel or hard tine rake.

Container Tree: A container tree *should* be removed by wiggling or cutting the container from the root ball. ANSI 64.5.6.1p.15. Before placing the root ball in the planting hole, it *shall* be sliced on all four sides and an x sliced into the bottom of the root ball to help detangle the root system from the root ball. Kinked, J roots, and circling roots *shall* be straightened or severed. ANSI 64.5.6.5 p.16.

Ball and Burlap with Wire Basket: When planting trees with wire basket and burlap all root ball supporting materials, burlap and wire basket *shall* be cut from the top third of the root ball and removed along with the tie up twine. The remaining wire basket and burlap *shall* be pressed down into the bottom of the planting hole. Remove all cut wire, burlap, and twine from the planting hole prior to backfilling. If the burlap is synthetic or chemically treated, it *shall* be removed completely before planting.

Planting: Place the tree in the center of the planting hole and straighten. Cut 1/3 of the burlap and wire basket from around the root ball and remove from planting hole. The bottom of the trunk flare (root collar) *shall* be a little above the finished grade, not to exceed one inch. Backfill the planting hole with the soil that was removed from the hole. Do not amend the backfill soil or add fertilizer. Backfill the hole in layers, tamp and add water to each layer to remove air pockets. Backfill *shall not* be tamped to compaction. All soil left over from the planting hole *shall* be removed from the planting site. Do not build dirt berms around the outside edge of the planting hole.

Staking: Support systems are not necessary for all newly planted trees. Trees needing to be staked *shall* be staked low on the trunk using 1 to 2, 2" sq. x 5' stake(s) and attaching to the tree trunk using 3/4" wide green tree tie webbing. Straps *shall* be loose enough to allow the tree to move slightly. This will help the tree grow a stronger root system and a strong tapered trunk. When using one stake for staking, attach tree tie webbing two-thirds up the tree trunk and place the stake upwind from the direction of the prevailing winds. When using two stakes for staking, attach tree tie webbing one-third up the tree trunk and place the stakes so that they run parallel to the prevailing winds. Stakes *shall* be removed after one growing season. *Do not* use wire and hose.

Trunk Protection: Do not use tree wrap or plastic tubing around the tree's trunk. Should trunk protection be needed for deer rubbing, 1/4" hardware cloth (turkey wire) 48" H *shall* be placed around the tree trunk leaving a 6" space between the tree trunk and wire mesh secured in place with two 2" x 2" x 6' wooden stakes driven securely into the ground and attached to the wire mesh with heavy duty zip ties.

Mulch: Arborist chips *shall* be spread 2 to 3 inches deep around the base of the tree. Keeping the mulch 3 to 4 inches from the trunk. Spread the mulch evenly out to the tips of the branches of the tree’s canopy (drip line). Do not use landscape fabric under the mulch.

Watering: ****This grant requires a 3-year guarantee watering contract, by a contractor, to be accompanied with closeout documentation in order to be paid out (this is not part of this grant or any grant in the future and shall not be reimbursed)**** Water the tree in by soaking the root ball. Then soak the soil around the root ball outward to the tree’s drip line. Trees *shall* be watered in after planting. NO amendments *shall* be added to the water. A newly planted tree needs 10 gallons of water per caliper inch per week and double that during a drought.

Pruning: At planting time, prune broken, dead, and rubbing branches. Corrective pruning *should* start after the second growing season.

Remove: All nursery tags, tie up twine, burlap, wire basket, and excess soil from planting holes *shall* be removed from trees and planting sites.

Awardee acknowledges that the contractor and/or volunteer organization adheres to the planting standards listed above. If the Recipient fails to meet the conditions of this appendix, the Delaware Forest Service reserves the right to cancel the award amount and require repayment.

Contractors’ signature

Date

Grantee’s signature

Date