



# ReLeaf Community Forestry Grants

2023 Request for Applications

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## Grant Overview

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources welcomes applications from local units of government and non-profit organizations within Minnesota that will encourage and promote the inventory, planting, assessment, maintenance, improvement, protection, and restoration of trees and forest resources to enhance community forest ecosystem health and sustainability as well as to reduce atmospheric carbon dioxide levels and promote energy conservation.

## Eligible Activities

- Community forestry work conducted on public land, or on residential land for low-income residents (work on residential land must be conducted by companies or organizations with an ISA Certified Arborist on staff, TCIA accreditation, or equivalent qualification)
- Work conducted by staff or contractors
- Tree inventories
- Developing a management plan, which can include but is not limited to a forestry-related climate adaptation plan, all lands management plan, or emerald ash borer management plan
- Tree and stump removal and tree replacement
- Tree planting
- Chemical treatment of ash trees with an injectable non-neonicotinoid insecticide (i.e. emamectin benzoate) if it provides long-term impact or seed funds an intended long-term program in communities up to 10 miles outside of generally infested areas across Minnesota (please see [online](#) guidance for more information)
- Developing a tree ordinance
- Tree cabling, if a long-term evaluation plan is included
- Maintenance pruning
- Urban and community forestry or arboriculture education and outreach
- Professional certifications and/or training related to the proposed project
- Additional plant healthcare treatments, as approved

## Eligible Applicants

Eligible applicants include non-profit organizations with 501(c) status and local units of government within Minnesota, including cities, counties, regional authorities, joint powers boards, towns, and tribal. Parks and recreation boards in cities of the first class are also eligible to apply.

Priority will be given to:

- Projects that serve communities with populations less than 20,000.
- Organizations who have staff, who plan to certify their staff during the grant period, or who will contract with companies with staff with professional tree care credentials (such as Minnesota Tree Inspector, International Society of Arboriculture Certified Arborist, etc.). Any such credentials must be listed on the application to be considered.
- Projects that prioritize emerald ash borer, especially removing and replacing ash trees that pose significant safety concerns.
- Projects that benefit underserved populations and areas of concern for environmental justice (communities with higher populations of low-income residents, or people of color, including tribal communities, or both). The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency has an interactive environmental justice [map](#) that, while not required, can be referenced with your application.

Successful applicants will describe how the proposed project activities benefit these communities, how these communities will be engaged and part of the decision-making process, and will demonstrate actionable items for these communities.

- Projects that maintain or increase tree canopy cover.

## Funding

The DNR has \$6,883,200 available in general fund dollars to fund projects managing forest pest and disease (with priority given to EAB) through community forestry activities on public lands and residential land for low-income residents. There is no minimum to the dollar amount applicants can request. The maximum amount that will be funded is \$500,000.

Funding will be allocated through a competitive grant process with review by a committee representing content and community specialists with regional knowledge. DNR expects to contact selected grantees by October 16, 2023. If selected, grantees may only incur eligible expenditures after the grant contract is fully executed and the grant has reached its effective date.

## Match Requirements and Explanation

No matching funds are required and **submitting match as part of your application is not recommended**. If match is provided, it cannot come from other grants or monies from the State of Minnesota.

There are two kinds of match funding, cash match and in-kind match. A cash match is a direct project expense provided by a grantee as a contribution to the project; i.e., cash expenditures for costs related to the specific project. This can include project-related staff salaries if they are dedicated to the project, consultant's fees or contractor expenses, equipment rentals and travel costs. In-kind match funds are materials and services, salaries and wages (including fringe benefits) being used that are not project-dedicated, space or utilities, equipment and/or technical assistance provided by the grantee or donated by a third party specifically for the project.

All contributions, whether cash or in-kind, will be accepted as the grantee's matching funds when those contributions meet the following criteria:

1. Are verifiable from the grantee's records;
2. Are not included as matching contributions for any other project, contract or program;
3. Are necessary and reasonable for accomplishing grant objectives; and
4. Are incurred and contributed within the grant period (not before the contract is fully executed, or after the grant timeline ends).

## Minimum Requirements

Applicants must meet the minimum requirements to be considered for this grant opportunity. Minimum requirements are:

- Local units of government must adopt an urban and community forest management plan through this grant process if the community does not yet have one in place.
- Showing the ability to implement the project, meet all grant objectives, and submit a final report by June 30, 2027.
- Replanting a minimum of one tree for each tree removed through grant or match funds.
- Providing photo documentation of the project's progress at appropriate phases, and illustrations, diagrams, charts, graphs, and maps to show results. All trees removed and planted must be mapped and submitted.
- Publicly posting and promoting grant project information and purpose.

- Complying with all Federal and State laws and regulations related to the completion of projects, as stated in the grant agreement.

### Additional Criteria

- Tree planting projects must follow standards set in [A Pocket Guide to Planting Trees](#)
- Tree inventory projects must submit obtained data to the DNR in a shapefile format
- Tree planting projects must identify tree species; site location; and number, size, and type of planting stock
  - Species list must increase the diversity of the community's tree canopy to work toward the 20-10-5 guidelines, meaning a community has no more than 20% of their trees within a single family, no more than 10% of their trees within a single genus, and no more than 5% of their trees within a single species. If your community does not have a completed tree survey, contact the DNR at [ucf.dnr@state.mn.us](mailto:ucf.dnr@state.mn.us) to receive your community's 2010 tree survey.
  - Species list for trees to be planted needs to be submitted and approved by DNR prior to planting.
  - Species list and numbers can be amended following the submission of tree inventory/survey data.
  - Tree stock can be ¾-2 inch caliper bareroot or a container class size #20 or smaller. DNR recommends trees be purchased with a one-year warranty. Flexibility is possible in instances where desired stock is unavailable.
  - Balled and burlapped trees are not eligible for reimbursement through this grant program.
- Tree planting projects must include a 3-year maintenance plan
- Residential tree care: for activities on residential land, residential agreements will be required. Work conducted on residential property will either be completed by residents (tree planting only), or by tree care companies holding liability insurance and with an ISA Certified Arborist on staff, or TCIA accreditation. Organizations will need to sign a formal agreement with the property owner. Residential agreements will contain the following language:
  - *The State of Minnesota is released from any liability associated with work completed on private property*
  - *Access is granted by the landowner for all planned activities within agreement; this may include but is not limited to: follow-up maintenance, monitoring, or other on-site work*
  - *I will plant and care for my tree according to the Tree Owner's Manual for as long as it is within my right to do so*
- Any education provided through this program must be conducted by an ISA Certified Arborist, TCIA accreditation or equivalent qualification, or must qualify for ISA continuing education units.

### Priority Projects

Ensuring fairness, precision, equity, and consistency in competitive grant awards is a policy of the State of Minnesota. This includes implementing diversity and inclusion in grant making. [The Policy on Rating Criteria for Competitive Grant Review](#) establishes the expectation that grant programs intentionally identify how the grant serves diverse populations, especially populations experiencing inequities or disparities, or both.

Projects that clearly benefit underserved populations and areas of concern for environmental justice (communities with higher populations of low-income residents, or people of color, including tribal communities, or both) will be rated higher. Please reference the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency's interactive environmental justice [map](#) for more information. Applicants should describe how the proposed project activities benefit and serve these communities.

### Eligible Project Expenses

Eligible project expenses are those incurred through project activities that are directly related and necessary to produce the outcomes described in the project application. Grant funds can be used for, but will not be limited to:

- Professional contracts for technical assistance or project implementation by individuals or organizations not a part of the local government unit (including but may not be limited to public tree inventories, management plans, treatment, and tree removal and replanting)
- Staff time for grant recipients
- Site preparation and planting, including trees, mulch, watering bags, staking materials, and tree wrap or guards
- Equipment purchases less than \$5,000 that are used to complete the project: multiple pieces of equipment, tools, or project supplies less than \$5,000 can be purchased with grant funds, but no one tool can have a unit cost of \$5,000 or more (even if that cost is split across grant and match funds)
- Equipment rental
- Gravel bed construction
- Purchasing of trees for diversity
- Materials and staff time used to educate, engage, and conduct outreach to citizens

### Ineligible Project Expenses

Ineligible project expenses include, but are not limited to:

Costs incurred prior to the start date on the fully executed grant agreement

- Grant funds will not fund the purchase of trees listed on the [Minnesota Noxious Weed List](#), or the DNR's [Invasive Terrestrial Plants List](#), including Amur cork tree, Amur maple, autumn olive, black locust, buckthorn, Norway maple, Russian olive, Siberian elm, and tree of heaven
- Purchase of balled and burlapped trees, containerized trees larger than #20, and bareroot trees greater than 2" caliper diameter
- Purchase of tree species that already make up 10% or more of the community's public trees, or whose family makes up 20% or more of the public trees
- Purchasing of plants such as shrubs, living ground covers, sod, grass seed, and flowers
- Purchasing of land or easements
- Major soil purchases, grade changes or construction
- Capital expenditures (items with a unit cost of \$5,000 or more), such as buildings, motor vehicles, or other permanent structures
- Experimental practices not approved by DNR

Questions about additional eligible or ineligible expenses can be directed to [ucf.dnr@state.mn.us](mailto:ucf.dnr@state.mn.us).

### Application Instructions

When filling out the application, ensure all sections are completed and the application is submitted by the deadline. Pay close attention to the requested information and respond to all questions. Detailed responses and completeness are strongly encouraged: if funded, application answers will become a grantee's work plan. Make sure enough information is provided, especially in the timeline and budget sections, to serve as a complete work plan. Grantees will need to meet the objectives stated in their work plans by the end of the grant program. Clearly demonstrate how the application connects to eligible activities, and make sure that no ineligible project expenses are listed for grant funding.

A complete application will consist of the following documents:

1. Application form (PDF, format unchanged)
2. Budget (Excel, format unchanged, additional lines added as needed)
3. 3-Year Tree Maintenance Plan for newly-planted trees, *if planting trees* (PDF, format unchanged)
4. Species and Stock List from which trees will be planted, *if planting trees* (any format acceptable; contact [ucf.dnr@state.mn.us](mailto:ucf.dnr@state.mn.us) with questions about species eligibility)
5. EAB Management Plan, if already completed (communities **must** have adopted or will adopt a management plan through this grant process- if your community does not have an EAB management plan in place, budget for the cost of obtaining one during this grant program)
6. Letter of Support, *if collaborating with an outside organization* (any format acceptable)

### Application Submission Instructions

After reading through the Request for Applications, complete all parts of the application found [online](#). Grant applicants are required to submit applications by email to [ucf.dnr@state.mn.us](mailto:ucf.dnr@state.mn.us). Applications must be received electronically by **September 18, 2023**, to be considered eligible for funding. DNR is not responsible for any technical or logistical problems causing an application to be received late. The applicant is responsible for ensuring their submission is received by DNR by the deadline; applications received after the deadline will not be eligible for consideration. All applicants will be notified by October 16, 2023, whether or not their project is to be funded.

### Review Process and Timeline

A UCF Grants Steering Committee, made up of Department of Natural Resources Forestry staff, Department of Agriculture staff, and select stakeholders, will recommend projects and award amounts. The steering committee will evaluate all eligible and complete applications received by the deadline. DNR will review all committee recommendations and is responsible for final award decisions. *The award decisions of DNR are final and not subject to appeal.*

RFA posted on the DNR <a href="#">website</a> .....	July 31, 2023
Application Questions due.....	Sept 4, 2023
Applications due.....	Sept 18, 2023
Application Grant Review Process .....	four weeks
Project Selection; Grant Agreement Negotiations Begin .....	Oct 16, 2023
Work Plans Approved, Contracts Executed, Grant Work Begins .....	Jan 1, 2024

Before awarding a grant of over \$25,000 to a nongovernmental organization, Minnesota state agencies must assess a recent financial statement from that organization. Items of significant concern must be discussed with the grant applicant and resolved to the satisfaction of state agency staff before a grant is awarded. As defined later, state agency staff must review at least one of the following documents before awarding a grant: an internal financial statement, an IRS Form 990, or a certified financial audit.

If selected for funding, nongovernmental organizations (NGO's) applying for over \$25,000 must incur a financial review and provide a completed Pre-Award Financial Review Form, and one of the following documents:

- NGO's with annual income of under \$50,000 or who have not been in existence long enough to have a completed IRS Form 990 or audit must submit their most recent board-reviewed financial statements
- NGO's with total annual revenue of \$50,000 or more and less than \$750,000 must submit their most recent IRS Form 990

- NGO's with total annual revenue of over \$750,000 must submit their most recent certified financial audit

Beginning January 1, 2024, Minnesota state agencies must perform a financial review on **all grant recipients**, including all local units of government. Due to the length of time needed to create and sign contracts, it is possible that local units of government may need to undergo a financial review as a part of this grant program.

### Questions:

Submit questions to [ucf.dnr@state.mn.us](mailto:ucf.dnr@state.mn.us). Answers will be posted weekly [online](#). Questions must be submitted no later than September 4, 2023, to be included on the website.

### Data Privacy and Trade Secret Notice

The information provided by an applicant will be used to assess the applicant's eligibility to receive a grant. The decision to apply for this grant is voluntary, and applicants are not legally required to provide any of the requested information. Applicants may decline to complete this application without any legal consequence. However, only completed applications will be considered for a grant; incomplete applications will not be considered.

Applications are private or non-public until opened. Once the applications are opened, the name and address of the applicant and the amount requested is public. All other data in an application is private or non-public data until all agreements are fully executed. After DNR has completed the evaluation process, all remaining data in the applications is public with the exception of trade secret data as defined and classified in Minn. Stat. § 13.37. A statement by a grantee that the application is copyrighted or otherwise protected does not prevent public access to the application (Minn. Stat. § 13.599, subd. 3).

### Liability and Project Implementation

DNR will not be held liable for any costs incurred by any firm for work performed in the preparation and production of a proposal, nor for any work performed prior to the execution of the contract. Project work and expenses that are eligible for reimbursement with grant funds CANNOT be started or incurred until the grant contract is fully executed. Grant agreements are expected to be finalized by January 1, 2024. Related grant project work can begin after all signatures are obtained. Interim reports and final reports will be required for all grant-funded projects.

Minnesota Department of Agriculture considers **May 1 – September 30** to be the flight season for EAB. This means that EAB adult beetles are emerging from infested wood or trees and flying in search of new hosts during this time. The best management practice is to not remove ash trees when EAB are actively flying (May-September), to avoid the risk of EAB emerging from this material in transit or at a processing location.

Emerald ash borer (EAB) infestations are difficult to identify in the early stages of the infestation. Emerald ash borer infestation areas grow via human-assisted movement and through natural dispersion. For these reasons, when new emerald ash borer infestations are discovered, quarantines are enacted on a large scale (county) with the assumption that the infestation is spread beyond what is observed. However, while the quarantine necessarily covers a large area where emerald ash borer may be present, the distribution of emerald ash borer is likely not uniform throughout the quarantine and may be in areas outside these boundaries.

These guidelines ideally should be followed 100 percent of the time when working with ash trees throughout the state of Minnesota. However, ***once a community is heavily infested with EAB (the point at which EAB-infested ash are so numerous that year-round removal of hazardous trees is necessary to mitigate risk to public), conducting ash tree removals during the emerald ash borer flight season may be***

***necessary to avoid risk to public safety and property.*** Following these guidelines will provide the lowest degree of risk for movement of emerald ash borer.

### Reimbursement

All funds will be awarded on a reimbursement basis. Following reimbursement request submissions (provided that work has been completed without issue), grant funds will be reimbursed up to 90%, with the final 10% retained until the project is completed. If and when requesting reimbursement, the reimbursement request form and required reports must be received by:

1. June 3, 2024
2. December 2, 2024
3. June 2, 2025
4. December 1, 2025
5. June 1, 2026
6. December 1, 2026
7. June 30, 2027

### Project Completion

All project work must be completed, and the final request for reimbursement (along with final reports) must be submitted by **June 30, 2027**.

### Other Considerations

DNR reserves the right to:

- Post funded applications and reports, including images and maps, to the DNR website
- Reject any or all proposals received
- Waive or modify minor irregularities in proposals received after prior notification and agreement of applicant
- Clarify the scope of this program, within the RFA requirements and with appropriate notice to potential applicants, to best serve the interests of the state of Minnesota
- Amend program specifications after the RFA release, with appropriate notice to potential applicants
- Require a good faith effort on the part of the grantee to work with DNR subsequent to project completion to develop or implement project results
- Withhold any payments or cancel contracts when contract conditions are not met

## Exhibit A: Application evaluation score sheet

### Selection Criteria and Weight

The steering committee will be reviewing each eligible application on a 100-point scale. Scores will be used to develop final recommendations. Applicants are encouraged to score their own applications using the evaluation score sheet before submitting the application. While not required, this step may help applicants meet the criteria that grant reviewers will be scoring.

Applications to the ReLeaf Community Forestry Grants will be evaluated and ranked according to the following criteria and points:	Points
<b>1. Project serves community (or communities) with population less than 20,000</b>	9
<b>2. Project Overview and Need</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Application is clear, complete, and descriptive</li> <li>Community has a readiness to take on a project of the proposed scope and size</li> <li>EAB prioritized, especially removing and replacing ash that pose significant safety concerns</li> <li>Project prioritizes the preservation and increase of canopy cover, and/or maintenance</li> </ul>	30
<b>3. Project Timeline</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Timeline provides specific dates for all activities</li> <li>Timeline is easy to read and comprehend</li> <li>Timeline follows best management practice for EAB infestations</li> <li>Timeline accounts for grant program reporting and end dates</li> </ul>	15
<b>4. Project Budget and Budget Explanation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Budget explanation provides specific dollar amounts for anticipated use</li> <li>Budget totals equal amount requested</li> <li>Financially realistic and cost effective</li> <li>Project seeks to replant more trees than removed</li> </ul>	10
<b>5. Project Impacts on Priority Populations</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Planning and collaboration clearly serves and includes areas of concern for environmental justice (communities with higher populations of low-income residents, people of color, including tribal communities, or both)</li> <li>Communities in areas of concern are engaged and input is incorporated prior to project implementation and through the project</li> <li>Applicant demonstrates actionable items for these communities (examples include program focal areas, outreach offered in multiple languages, added inclusion), impacts on diverse populations are clear and tangible</li> </ul>	20
<b>6. Communications</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Communication strategies directly related to project accomplishments, activities, or both, and multiple forms of communication are listed with potential to reach the public</li> <li>EAB-related messaging included designed to slow the spread</li> </ul>	8
<b>7. Key Personnel</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Key personnel are listed with corresponding project roles</li> <li>All certifications and education degrees are listed for staff or contractors</li> <li>A high scoring community will have staff or contractors with a degree in a related field, or a combination/multiple staff with ISA Certified Arborist, TCIA accreditations, or both</li> </ul>	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>