



Tree Equity:

A solution for thriving,
more resilient communities



What is Tree Equity?

In America's cities, a map of tree cover clearly shows how decades of discriminatory practices have led to certain communities lacking the many benefits that urban trees and greenspaces offer. From flood protection to mental health benefits, trees are critical for thriving, resilient communities.

The data is clear. According to American Forests' Tree Equity Score, lower-income communities have **26% less tree cover** and are **6°F hotter** than wealthier ones, and communities of color have **38% less tree cover** and are **13°F hotter**. In a century when U.S. heat-related deaths could rise to 100,000 per year, prioritizing equitable tree cover for these underserved communities is a moral imperative — and it requires a reimagining of our cities.

Achieving Tree Equity means closing the current tree gap of **500 million new trees**, while improving and protecting existing urban forests. Tree Equity means ensuring the funding, policies, jobs, and community capacity to sustain an equitable tree canopy now and into the future for the benefit of all.

With this, American Forests has mobilized the Tree Equity movement and is providing the tools, funding, and workforce needed to achieve it. Whether you're just getting started or are well on your way, we look forward to partnering with you on your Tree Equity journey.

BENEFITS OF URBAN TREES



**Reduce
urban heat**



**Improve
air quality**



**Conserve
energy**



**Prevent
flooding**



**Improve
public health**




**Create
green jobs**



“Latino/e community-based organizations and leaders know the reality of tree inequity all too well. American Forests’ Tree Equity Score and Tree Equity resources are equipping our partners with the data and tools necessary to strive for the greener future they deserve.”

AMANDA PANTOJA
URBAN GREENING INITIATIVE COORDINATOR, GREENLATINOS



Pathway to Tree Equity

**Make a commitment
to Tree Equity**

**Find your
Tree Equity Score**

**Build an inclusive,
cross-sector coalition**

**Ensure community
participation**

**Develop Tree Equity
plans and policies**

**Fund your
Tree Equity efforts**

**Build and support
a workforce**

**Grow, plant, maintain,
and reuse your trees**

**Start your
Tree Equity Journey**



Make a commitment

to Tree Equity

Mayors and town councils are key to establishing the political will and long-term investments needed for thriving, resilient communities. By publicly supporting Tree Equity through a proclamation or resolution, you can raise awareness about your need for trees. This commitment helps you build new partnerships, raise more funding, and communicate the impact of your programs to the community.

American Forests can help you develop a **data-driven Tree Equity goal** for your community, create the communication materials needed for a proclamation, and work together with your local leaders and lawmakers to help make your community a leader in the Tree Equity movement.

RESOURCES

→ [Tree Equity Handbook](#)

HIGHLIGHT

Phoenix, Arizona Tree Equity Commitment

In 2021, Phoenix Mayor Kate Gallego became the first U.S. mayor to commit to Tree Equity in all city neighborhoods by 2030. This helped start a strong partnership to improve tree care and planting across Maricopa County. Cities are working together to plant trees, train volunteer tree stewards, and engage the community.





Find your

Tree Equity Score

American Forests' Tree Equity Score is an interactive map that demonstrates where the greatest need for trees exists in cities. After entering an address or city location, Tree Equity Score examines tree cover in relation to heat, age, health, income, language, and race. This tool — available in all 2,600 U.S. urban areas — can help city leaders advocate for investing in and planting trees where they are needed most.

Tree Equity Score now also includes more specific **Location Insights** that can estimate benefits of new trees in a city, provide canopy trends, and create downloadable reports.

Additionally, American Forests works directly with communities in creating even more detailed **Tree Equity Score “Analyzers,”** which incorporate local datasets, allowing for a richer experience when planning for urban forestry projects. Analyzers are currently available in over 12 cities, regions, and states.

Tree Equity Score is your tool for turning data into action.

HIGHLIGHT

Indianapolis, Indiana Tree Equity Score Analyzer

In 2024, American Forests built an Analyzer for Indianapolis, Indiana and surrounding Marion County based on feedback from local government, environmental, and public health agencies. This free tool is used by partners, such as Keep Indianapolis Beautiful, to ensure city resources are invested in neighborhoods with the greatest need.



RESOURCES

→ [Tree Equity Score](#)

A photograph of children playing on a large tree stump in a park. A girl in a grey patterned jacket is jumping over the stump, while other children are visible in the background. The scene is set in front of a brick building.

Build an inclusive, cross-sector coalition

For the long-term viability of trees and forests, we need to build trust with the community who will be there to take care of them. Community members, forestry experts, small businesses, and institutions should work together with city parks, forestry, public works, planning, and transportation departments to reach common goals.

American Forests can help you **engage diverse community members** to form a strong coalition that advances your vision for people and forests. We start by helping you identify potential partners and support you in recruitment, setting goals, and creating plans that build trust and address community concerns.

HIGHLIGHT

Washington State Tree Equity Collaborative

In 2023, American Forests and Washington State Department of Natural Resources created a first-of-its-kind statewide Tree Equity coalition. This group includes over 70 cities, counties, tribes, and non-profits working together to advance a unified vision to achieve Tree Equity in every city across the state.



RESOURCES

➔ [Tree Equity Handbook](#)

Ensure community participation

The Tree Equity movement is built around responding to historical discrimination. This requires us to include communities in the reimagining of their neighborhoods.

American Forests can help you **understand your city's Tree Equity Score** to better speak with residents about your city's need for trees. We can help **design community engagement activities that reach your targeted audience**, such as community workshops or neighborhood outreach. Based on the community's views and priorities, we can help you create goals that meet their needs.

By listening to voices from your community and involving them in planning and decision-making, you can more equitably close the tree canopy gap in your city.



HIGHLIGHT


Austin, Texas Community Engagement

American Forests helped local partner TreeFolks uplift youth and community voices by gathering input regarding planting trees during the school's Hispanic Heritage Festival. This feedback helped inform the design for a tree planting event that resulted in an increase from 8% tree canopy to 13% at the school.

RESOURCES

- [➔ Community Action Guide](#)
- [➔ Tree Equity Handbook](#)





Develop Tree Equity plans and policies

Harmful land planning and urban policies, such as historical redlining, created differences in neighborhood quality that still exist today, including inequitable tree cover. City- and county-wide plans that address climate change, urban forestry, complete streets, and mobility offer powerful opportunities to create cities with thriving green spaces. Additionally, enacting and enforcing existing local ordinances that protect and expand forest cover can help ensure that Tree Equity is codified in your city.

American Forests can help you **include Tree Equity in your city's plans and policies**. We can present to your local leaders and lawmakers, share case studies of other Tree Equity plans and policies, and help inspire action.



HIGHLIGHT

Boston, Massachusetts Urban Forestry

American Forests helped Boston focus on Tree Equity in their urban forestry plan. With an “Equity First” goal, they have committed to investing in historically excluded neighborhoods with fewer trees and more social issues. This plan led to growing their urban forestry department and workforce to meet their tree canopy needs, even with the challenges of a dense and historic city.

RESOURCES

- [Community Assessment & Goal Setting Tool](#)
- [Urban Forestry Roadmap](#)

Fund your Tree Equity efforts

Fundraising is a complicated task – especially for under-resourced cities and organizations. Turn your plan into action using proven funding models to grow your Tree Equity program. These can include city budgets, corporate investments and private donations, along with state and federal funds. For example, the 2022 Inflation Reduction Act provided \$1.5 billion for urban forestry in over 300 cities. Additional sustainable financing options include urban forest carbon credits, Tree Funds, impact investing, and land development fees.

American Forests can help you **develop a financing model** that brings together public and private partners to support your Tree Equity program. By pursuing a diverse mix of funding sources, you will better position your city for long-term Tree Equity success.



HIGHLIGHT

American Forests Tree Equity Catalyst Fund

We support front-line organizations, faith-based institutions, and municipalities with cash grants and technical assistance. Since 2024, we have given \$40 million in grants to catalyze the Tree Equity movement. Projects include equitable urban forestry planning, planting and care, coalition building, workforce development, tree nursery development, and more.

RESOURCES

- ➔ [Urban Forestry Funding Action Guide](#)
- ➔ [Catalyst Initiative & Fund](#)





Build and support a workforce

To achieve Tree Equity, we need a new generation of urban foresters with the skills needed to effectively grow, plant, and maintain trees in changing and harsh urban environments. Additionally, jobs are growing beyond just tree care to include mapping, community engagement, and working with related fields. Central to the Tree Equity movement is creating new career paths that include advancing social and economic justice. By creating job opportunities in neighborhoods that need trees the most, we can strengthen the community, build better futures for individuals, and boost the economic benefits and care of trees.

American Forests has experts, networks, and free resources to help you **find, train, hire, and keep the skilled workers** needed to close the tree canopy gap. We can help you build industry partnerships, collaborate across sectors, and work with your local workforce development board to meet your employment goals.

RESOURCES

- [Career Resources for Students, Professionals, Career Changers, and Employers](#)

HIGHLIGHT

Memphis, Tennessee Career Training

American Forests supported The Works, Inc. in launching the TreeCPR workforce training program. This program prepares Memphis residents for careers in urban forestry, including tree care, nursery operations, and urban wood reuse. Trainees develop essential life skills for overcoming barriers, navigating the workplace, and building confidence.



Grow, plant, maintain and reuse your trees

To achieve Tree Equity, we need experts that know how to plant the right trees in the right places, including understanding the species and tree supplies needed in a changing climate. Understanding which species to use, where you can source adaptive tree stock, and how to expand small business opportunities through **nursery development** are critical for ensuring a science-driven approach to Tree Equity in your city.

Smart tree planting, care, and protection are vital to tree survival. Tactics range from assessing which species are most vulnerable to heat, moisture, and disease to developing ordinances that protect existing trees. Additionally, fallen or diseased trees create economic opportunity for cities. **Urban wood reuse** diverts this organic waste from landfills, and in doing so, generates revenue and jobs through wood sales.

RESOURCES

- [Vibrant Cities Lab](#)
- [Climate and Health Action Guide](#)
- [Urban Forestry Roadmap](#)
- [Urban Wood Use Action Guide](#)

HIGHLIGHTS

Columbus, Ohio Nurseries

American Forests helped local partners Friends of the Lower Olentangy Watershed and Green Columbus establish a series of vacant lot nurseries. We provided funding and engaged volunteers in building the nurseries. Today, they continue to grow thousands of trees for local projects.

Pawtucket and Central Falls, Rhode Island

American Forests and the Northern Institute of Applied Climate Science developed a tree species list for Rhode Island. The list helps in selecting trees most able to reduce climate change vulnerability, remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, and provide benefits to human health. It is now used to guide the planting of trees in Health Equity Zones across the state.

How American Forests can help

We are here to support you no matter where you are on the journey to Tree Equity.

Our team of experts and certified arborists can help you achieve your goals for committing to and advancing Tree Equity.



**On-Demand resources
and advice**



**Peer learning
networks**



**Technology
and data tools**



**Funding
guidance**



**Technical
assistance**



**Advocacy
support**

Nearly 200 Cities Are Part of the Tree Equity Movement. Join Us.



“Cities are at the forefront of the climate and urban heat crisis. American Forests has been a trusted partner in mobilizing city leaders across government and civil society sectors to drive forward the Tree Equity movement, including launching the first state-wide Tree Equity coalition in Washington to unite our cities towards collective action.”

HILARY FRANZ

**FORMER COMMISSIONER OF PUBLIC LANDS,
WASHINGTON DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES**



Let's get to work

TreeEquity@AmericanForests.org

AmericanForests.org/TreeEquity

TreeEquityScore.org

This document and
resource links can be
found online:



American Forests is the first national nonprofit conservation organization created in the U.S. Since its founding in 1875, the organization has been the pathfinders for the forest conservation movement. Its mission is to create healthy and resilient forests, from cities to large natural landscapes, that deliver essential benefits for climate, people, water, and wildlife. The organization advances its mission through forestry, innovation, place-based partnerships to plant and restore forests, and movement building.

For more information visit: AmericanForests.org.

American Forests is also a lead member of the Tree Equity Alliance. The Tree Equity Alliance, formed by American Forests, GreenLatinos, Groundwork USA, and the 1890 Universities Foundation, aims to address environmental and health challenges by advocating for equitable tree canopy coverage and the resources needed to achieve Tree Equity to create healthier, safer, and more connected communities.