

PROJECT NARRATIVE

Growing Equity in Oregon's Urban and Community Forests: Investing in Disadvantaged Communities to Promote Social, Economic, and Environmental Well-Being

1. Project Scope Alignment:

1.1 Problem Statement

Similar to other states and cities, urban and community forestry (UCF) benefits in Oregon are unevenly distributed, with affluent areas having more tree canopy and greenspace while underserved communities suffer from air pollution, urban heat, and environmental health issues without access to forest resources for mitigation ([Gerrish & Watkins, 2018](#); [Nesbitt et al., 2019](#); [Nowak et al., 2022](#); [Schwarz et al., 2015](#); [Watkins & Gerrish, 2018](#)). Disadvantaged communities, and those serving them, face multiple barriers to accessing federal funding, including limited resources, lack of grant application experience, language barriers, institutional biases, geographic constraints, and bureaucratic challenges ([Enterprise, 2022](#); [Lu, 2015](#); [US Dept of Interior](#)). The voices and needs of these communities are often excluded from decision-making and implementation of greening initiatives, perpetuating procedural injustice in the forestry field ([Grant et al, 2022](#)).

In addition to existing UCF inequities and environmental injustices, Oregon's forests face growing threats from climate change (e.g., extreme heat events), exotic pests (e.g., emerald ash borer), and development pressure. Furthermore, inadequate nursery stock remains a limiting factor even in areas with strong programs and funding for community tree planting initiatives.

Regarding this UCF funding opportunity, the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) recognizes organizations' constraints due to tight timelines and internal capacity limitations, leading to missed opportunities for entities well-suited to engage with disinvested communities, represent their interests, and champion a more equitable approach to urban and community forestry. ODF aims to address this issue by providing funding and directing resources to areas of greatest need.

1.2 Alignment with NOFO Goals

The proposed project not only meets but exceeds the Justice40 Initiative goals by ***focusing exclusively on urban and rural community forestry efforts that enhance the social, environmental, and economic benefits for disadvantaged communities***, while ensuring stakeholder consultation and community involvement in determining program benefits. The activities, programs, and methodologies outlined in this proposal are solidly aligned with the seven priorities outlined in the NUCFAC *Ten-Year Urban and Community Forestry Action Plan (2016-2026)*, which include integrating urban forestry into all planning scales, promoting the role of urban forestry in human health, cultivating diversity and equity within the urban forestry community, strengthening forest health and biodiversity, improving forest management, diversifying and increasing funding, and increasing public awareness and environmental education. The proposed project will also advance the strategic themes from ODF's Forest Action Plan (2021) that include strengthening partnerships, building capacity and funding, capitalizing on "co-benefits," actively managing all forestlands, supporting informed decision-making, and gaining support through effective engagement.

Oregon has a longstanding cultural connection to forests, and the present proposal brings this connection into focus in more urbanized areas of the state which have traditionally had limited forestry engagement. The ODF Urban & Community Forestry Assistance Program (ODF-UCF) and partners would like to leverage this cultural identity to usher in a new era of forestry in Oregon. ODF-UCF has identified six core implementation strategies based on feedback from Tribes, community-based organizations, nonprofits, and local government agencies. ***These strategies align with the goals outlined in the Ten-Year Urban Forestry Action Plan: 2016-2026, ODF's Forest Action Plan, and the Justice40 Initiative.***

These six core implementation strategies provide the architecture for our proposed project strategies, methods, and budget:

1. Support urban forestry assessment, planning, and prioritization,
2. Support culturally responsive UCF centered education, engagement, recreation, and community-building initiatives,
3. Build capacity with collective impact through an UCF network,
4. Support workforce diversification and professional development,
5. Significantly expand tree production, planting, and maintenance, and
6. Support monitoring, adaptive management, and lesson sharing.

1.3 Project Activities

ODF is requesting \$20 million to fund two subaward programs. One will fund projects proposed by Oregon's nine Federally Recognized Tribes; the other will fund eligible entities whose projects align with federal and state goals to promote urban and community forests and tree equity for overburdened and underserved communities in Oregon, ***as defined by the Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool (CEJST) or other USFS-approved screening tools.***

ODF will issue the first public Request for Proposals (RFP) within six months of execution of a grant agreement and will issue RFPs annually thereafter. ODF's tribal liaison is working in collaboration with the nine Federally Recognized Tribes and Tribal organizations in Oregon to establish a reasonable timeline for tribal proposals that accommodates the Tribes' processes for assessing their needs and preparing their funding requests.

ODF is committed to reducing barriers for organizations/agencies that have traditionally been excluded from federal funding opportunities. In addition to \$20 million in subawards above, ODF will use funds to strengthen relationships with Tribal and disadvantaged communities through culturally appropriate outreach, engagement, and technical assistance to applicants and subaward recipients. An Equity and Engagement Specialist (1 FTE) and Community Assistance Forester (1 FTE) will work in collaboration with community-based outreach and engagement consultants with established relationships with overburdened and underserved communities. ODF will also hire third-party consultants to provide technical assistance to subaward applicants and subrecipients on proposal development and submission, project performance monitoring, reporting, and creation of communication materials that highlight funding partnerships and project accomplishments. Further, ODF has budgeted grant funds to increase production of nursery stock and subsidize coordinated procurement of trees for organizations and agencies that are planting trees or developing tree planting programs in disadvantaged communities.

2. Implementation Strategy/Methodology/Timeline:

NOTE: ODF will initiate work on some methods using funding from the initial state IRA allocation of \$3.75 million.

Implementation Strategy 1: Support UCF assessment, planning, and prioritization.

- **Method 1-A:** Invest, through subawards, in project proposals that conduct UCF assessment, planning, and prioritization.
→ *Timeline: Funds distributed in fall 2024, 2025, and 2026.*
- **Method 1-B (initial funding from April 2023 state UCF allocation):** ODF and contracted partners will engage in conversational outreach and/or formal interviews with stakeholders across the state to determine 1) existing UCF conditions, 1) UCF needs and opportunities in underserved and overburdened communities, 2) ongoing UCF initiatives, and 3) barriers to enhancing UCF locally. This will result in a “State of Urban & Community Forestry” report for the state of Oregon.
→ *Timeline: Initial report published by December 2023.*
- **Method 1-C:** Publish “State of Urban & Community Forestry” report annually to compile and disseminate new findings, recommendations, and project highlights.
→ *Timeline: Reports published annually in December 2024-2028.*

Implementation Strategy 2: Support culturally responsive UCF centered education, engagement, recreation, and community-building initiatives.

- **Method 2-A:** Invest, through subawards, in organizations and programs that support 1) UCF centered education (e.g., school greening projects and UCF curriculum integration), 2) immersive or experiential outdoor recreation, 3) engagement (e.g., food security, urban wood utilization, and arts programs), and 4) community-building initiatives (i.e., establishing an inclusive and non-polarizing tree-centered culture).
→ *Timeline: Funds distributed in fall 2024, 2025, and 2026.*
- **Method 2-B:** ODF staff and contracted partners will work with city and county agencies, schools, non-profits, community-based organizations, and community members to facilitate conversations and processes that center and involve underserved and underrepresented community perspectives in education, engagement, and other programming.
→ *Timeline: Continuous throughout the 5-year grant period.*

Implementation Strategy 3: Build capacity with collective impact through an Oregon urban and community forestry network.

- **Method 3-A (initial funding from April 2023 state UCF allocation):** ODF will contract with network consultants to convene and facilitate an Oregon UCF network of diverse stakeholders and partners to incubate new partnerships, identify barriers and remedies and leverage new funding to accelerate cross-sector, interdisciplinary partnerships and projects that amplify the impact of IRA UCF funding.
→ *Timeline: Fall/Winter 2023 through fall/winter 2025.*
- **Method 3-B:** ODF will provide “backbone support” for the network by funding a network coordination services contractor to sustain and expand the UCF network, coordinate team

meetings, and identify pathways for long-term network viability. All subaward applicants and recipients will be encouraged to participate in the network to align efforts statewide.

→ **Timeline:** *Fall/Winter 2025 through the end of the 5-year grant period.*

- **Method 3-C:** ODF staff and contracted partners will identify potential network partners, particularly those serving disadvantaged communities, and engage them in network activities.

→ **Timeline:** *Continuous throughout the 5-year grant period.*

- **Method 3-D:** Establish inter-agency network teams to focus and lead on key strategies, including UCF planning, workforce diversification, nursery capacity building, tree planting and maintenance best management practices, communications, and adaptive management.

→ **Timeline:** *Convene teams by December 2024 and support regular meetings throughout the 5-year grant period.*

Implementation Strategy 4: Support workforce diversification and professional development.

- **Method 4-A:** Invest, through subawards, in organizations and programs that contribute to UCF workforce diversification and professional development.

→ **Timeline:** *Fall 2024, 2025, and 2026.*

- **Method 4-B (initial funding from April 2023 state UCF allocation):** ODF will hire workforce diversification and development contractors (two years of funding) to identify UCF-related workforce development issues and opportunities, specifically focused on increasing diversity, equity, and inclusion.

→ **Timeline:** *Initial findings will be included in the “State of Urban & Community Forestry” report in 2023; updates will be added to subsequent 2024 and 2025 reports.*

- **Method 4-C:** Workforce diversification and development contractors will partner with high schools and colleges, including tribal institutions, to increase enrollment of students with diverse backgrounds participating in forest related internships, apprenticeships, and relevant degree or certificate programs.

→ **Timeline:** *Begin spring 2026 and continue throughout the 5-year grant period.*

Implementation Strategy 5: Significantly expand tree production, planting, and maintenance.

- **Method 5-A:** Invest, through subawards, in organizations and programs that expand tree planting and tree maintenance activities by, in, and for disadvantaged communities.

→ **Timeline:** *Funds distributed in fall 2024, 2025, and 2026.*

- **Method 5-B:** ODF will contract with various agencies/organizations to establish statewide cooperative growing, distribution, and planting agreements to improve the supply and availability of high-quality, climate resilient tree saplings for planting in disadvantaged communities.

→ **Timeline:** *Begins spring 2024 and continues throughout the 5-year grant period.*

Implementation Strategy 6: Support monitoring, adaptive management, and lesson sharing.

- **Method 6-A (initial funding from April 2023 state UCF allocation):** ODF’s Subaward Program Coordinator will develop a monitoring and reporting system and create an online grant portal to collect and report structure that tracks and compiles impact metrics. Summaries

of subaward project accomplishments, challenges and lessons learned will be communicated in ODF-UCF quarterly newsletters and in “State of Urban & Community Forestry” reports. ODF staff will use a constituent relationship management (CRM) software solution to record stakeholders’ affiliations, activities, and achievements and track interactions between ODF staff and community partners.

→ **Timeline:** *Continuous throughout the 5-year grant period.*

- **Method 6-B:** ODF staff and contracted partners will assist subrecipients with project monitoring, reporting, public communications, and “storytelling” to highlight funding partners and accomplishments for all six implementation strategies.

→ **Timeline:** *Begins fall 2024; continuous thereafter throughout grant period.*

3. Evidence of Disadvantaged Community Status for projects requesting Match Waiver (if applicable):

This funding request is focused on reducing UCF inequities and enhancing benefits for disadvantaged communities throughout Oregon. ODF is requesting a 100% match waiver for this project. ***If awarded, all funding will be dedicated to supporting overburdened and underserved communities, as defined by the CEJST tool or other USFS-approved methods.*** ODF will require that all funded subaward proposals geographically demonstrate how projects serve disadvantaged communities.

With this proposal, ODF is attempting to usher in a new approach to urban and community forestry. Oregon has a long history of social and environmental injustice (e.g., [Gibson, 2007](#); [Barber, 2018](#)), particularly with regard to Tribal communities (e.g., [Curry-Stevens, Cross-Hemmer, & Coalition of Communities of Color, 2011](#)). At present, over 67% of Oregon is considered overburdened and underserved (Figure 1-2), while 59% of cities across the state are home to disadvantaged communities (e.g., Figure 3), demonstrating the immense need for UCF investment. As such, this funding would provide a momentous opportunity to invest in disadvantaged urban, rural, and Indigenous communities throughout Oregon to promote social, economic, and environmental well-being and redress persistent environmental inequities.