

# Five-Year Benchmark Report

Ten-Year Urban Forestry Action Plan: 2016 -2026

*Photo Credit: Willimyn Brown*



**National Urban and  
Community Forestry  
Advisory Council**

# FIVE YEARS OF ACTION

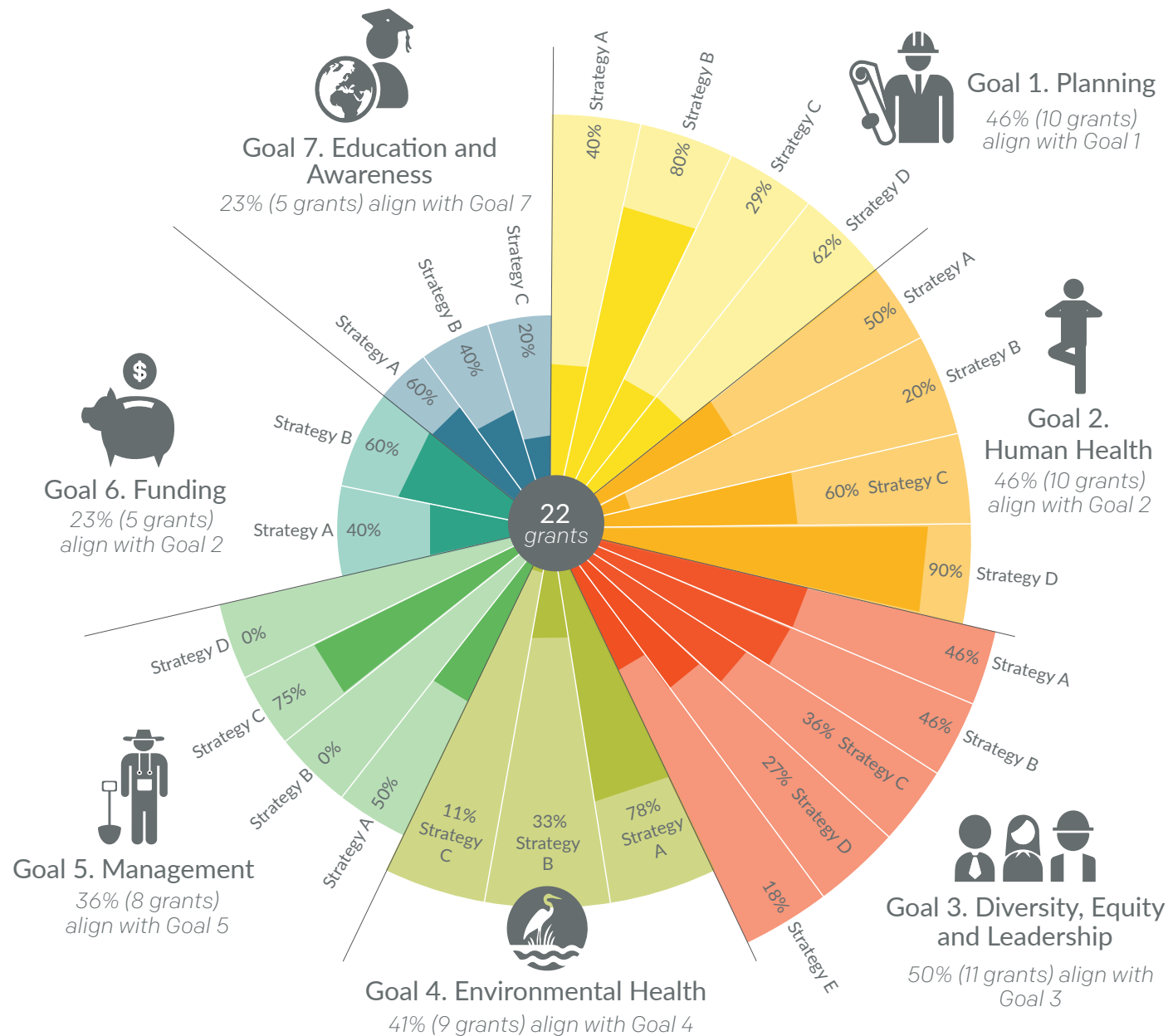
The Ten-Year Urban Forestry Action Plan: 2016-2026 seeks to expand awareness of the benefits that our urban forests provide to communities across the United States, and increase investments in these urban forest resources for the benefit of current and future generations. Developed in 2015, the Action Plan serves as a guiding document for funding and programmatic priorities of the USDA Forest Service's National Urban and Community Forestry program and the program's National Challenge Cost Share Grants.

At this five-year juncture, this benchmark report assesses and documents the work that has occurred from 2016 to 2021 and identifies key opportunities for the remaining years of the Action Plan. The time period reflected in this report included the COVID-19 global pandemic which brought significant

challenges to continued delivery of service and shed light on disproportionate impacts experienced by disadvantaged communities. The impacts of the pandemic are ongoing and reverberate across the National Urban and Community Forestry Advisory Council's (NUCFAC) work. Urban and community forestry has continued to play an essential role to the physical and mental health of the country. Additionally, climate change continues to produce new and emerging threats to urban and community forestry, which will require collaborative and creative solutions from NUCFAC and its many partners, with a focus on equity and environmental justice. With continued implementation of the Action Plan, NUCFAC is well-positioned to serve as a leader and resource in supporting communities to rise to the challenges of the

## COST SHARE GRANTS IN ACTION

From 2016-2021, the USDA Forest Service funded 22 projects through the competitive National Challenge Cost Share Grant Program. The diagram below shows the grants alignment with the 7 goals and 25 strategies in the Action Plan.



## NATIONAL URBAN AND COMMUNITY FORESTRY ADVISORY COUNCIL

The National Urban and Community Forestry Advisory Council (NUCFAC) is a Congressionally designated advisory council to the Secretary of Agriculture, created by the 1990 Farm Bill to bring together the wide variety of perspectives on the present health and future preservation of America's forests. NUCFAC is the steward of the Ten-Year Urban Forestry Action Plan, and uses the Plan to develop annual grant categories and make recommendations through the competitive National Urban Forestry Challenge Cost Share Grant Program.

Below is a list of NUCFAC members who assisted in the development of the Ten-Year Urban Forestry Action Plan:

- In Memoriam Kamran Adbollah**  
Academic Institutions with Expertise in Urban and Community Forestry Activities
- Liam Kavanagh**  
National Nonprofit Forestry and Conservation Citizen Organization
- Sara Davis**  
County Government
- Lisa Ortega**  
City/Town Government
- Lance Davisson**  
Member representing a community with a population more than 50,000 with experience and is active in urban and community forestry
- In Memoriam Paul Revell**  
State Government
- Karen Firehock**  
Academic Institutions with Expertise in Urban and Community Forestry Activities
- Claire Robinson**  
National Nonprofit Forestry and Conservation Citizen Organization
- Steve Goetz**  
Professional Renewable Natural Resource or Arboriculture Society
- Robert Ruano**  
Member representing a community with a population less than 50,000 with experience and is active in urban and community forestry
- William Hubbard**  
USDA Extension Service
- Eli Suzukovich III, PhD**  
Forest Products, Nursery, or Related Industries
- Scott Josiah**  
State Forestry Agency
- Walt Warriner**  
Urban Forestry, Landscape, and Design Consultants

## BY THE NUMBERS

**22**  
National Challenge Cost Share Grants

**50%**  
National Challenge Cost Share Grants related to Research

**\$4,534,992**  
U.S. Forest Service Investment in National Challenge Cost Share Grants

**\$9,722,109**  
Total Investment, including applicant match, in National Challenge Cost Share Grants



Photo Credit: Miranda Hutton



Photo Credit: Miranda Hutton



Photo Credit: Willimyn Brown

# GRANT SPOTLIGHTS

From 2016-2021, the Forest Service and NUCFAC stewarded 22 grants in support of the Ten-Year Urban Forestry Action Plan. Four grants are highlighted below to demonstrate the breadth and depth of the National Challenge Cost Share Grant Program in addressing key priorities.



## ECOTRUST

### *Growing the Tribal Forestry Workforce in the Pacific NW & Beyond*

Working with tribal partners, Ecotrust is exploring opportunities for tribal community forestry and green infrastructure development projects, and associated workforce development programs. These areas include the Pacific Northwest, South, and Eastern regions of the country and potentially in the Midwest and Southwest. This work includes a gap and opportunity assessment to gather shared knowledge of the successes, challenges, and current landscape of opportunities to design and implement tribal community forestry and green infrastructure programs. As many Native Americans live in off-reservation communities, Ecotrust is focusing on connecting Native youth and underemployed adults with tribal green infrastructure and community forestry leaders, educational and employment opportunities, and resources.

*Photo Credit: Sean Gutierrez*



## CLEMSON UNIVERSITY + KAISER PERMANENTE

### *Urban Forestry's Return on Investment: Tying Residential Nature to Health Care Expenditures*

Dozens of studies involving millions of people document the connection between urban and community forests and human health: in greener places, people are healthier. Recent work from a partnership between Clemson University and Kaiser Permanente quantifies the impacts of the urban forest on health care expenditures and calculates how much people spend on health care in areas with well-developed urban and community forests compared to areas without these forests – where the greatest health disparities lie. This research has demonstrated that urban greening is a potentially low-cost, effective way of substantially reducing health care expenditures.

*Photo Credit: Myron Fields*



## GIVING GROVE

### *Addressing Food Insecurity through a Collaborative National Urban Orchard Network*

Giving Grove aims to create a network of major metropolitan areas utilizing urban orchards to improve health and wellness in underserved neighborhoods while using green infrastructure to strengthen resiliency of urban communities. A reliable, hyper-local free food supply improves the health and well-being of residents in these neighborhoods, many of whom experience chronic food insecurity. Expansion of the network will be supported in part by approximately 116 neighborhood-based, trained volunteers who will care for the trees via the organization's holistic urban orcharding processes.

*Photo Credit: Willimyn Brown*



## SUSTAINABLE RESOURCES INSTITUTE

### *Creating Full Circle Forestry Management through the Urban Wood Network*

The Urban Wood Network (UWN) works to ensure urban trees can live on after they are removed due to death, disease, pests, development or other circumstances, by utilizing their wood to its highest use to maximize economic, environmental and societal benefits for urban communities across the nation. UWN creates full circle urban forestry management by working cooperatively from arborist to consumer. Utilizing dead trees to alleviate cost burdens on municipalities allowing realized savings to be used to enhance urban forest management to ensure healthy, diverse, and resilient urban forests.

*Photo Credit: US Forest Service*



## KEY OPPORTUNITIES

Building on five years of progress, the following areas represent key opportunities for continuing implementation of the Action Plan through 2026.

- **Collaborate with Regional Coordinators** to share the Action Plan and identify opportunities for implementation in their regions.
- Collaborate with State Foresters to identify opportunities to utilize the Action Plan as a guidance document for the State Forest Action Plans with the goal of **creating synergy across national and state-level priorities**.
- **Increase engagement and collaboration with tribal partners and island communities** through the National Challenge Cost Share Grant and other Urban and Community Forestry programs or initiatives.
- Consider creating a designated staff member or new hire to encourage and **increase awareness of NUCFAC grants** and support those in the application process, especially considering those whose native language is not English.
- Partner with USFS Research Stations to explore opportunities for **aligning research initiatives with the Action Plan**.
- Prioritize Goal 1 "Integrate urban and community forestry into all scales of planning," by exploring opportunities to **connect with regional and local municipal governments** and implementing recommended actions.
- Rebrand and/or reintroduce existing resources and create additional resources for municipalities/regions focused on inclusion of trees in all community comprehensive or master plans and **develop benchmarking for sustainability goals**. Resources could include case studies, sample metrics and long-range planning documents, and trainings. *(Goal 1, Strategy A, Action 3)*
- Collaborate with partners to explore national priorities of **environmental and climate justice** and to understand and connect urban forestry needs at the grassroots level, with **emphasis on underrepresented demographic groups**. *(Goal 3, Strategy E, Action 2)*
- Develop **resilient urban tree species** to address impacts of climate change.



## EMERGING ISSUES

Urban forests are a frontline protector against climate change, and new efforts will be required to expand and better integrate green infrastructure to mitigate impacts like extreme heat and urban wildfires.

- **Expand workforce development** efforts to engage more community members in urban forestry reforestation.
- Collaborate with public health networks to **address extreme heat impacts** through improved integration in state and regional planning and other measures.
- Amplify Urban and Community Forestry's (UCF) role in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) to **increase equity and awareness in urban wildfire response**.

# LOOKING AHEAD

## Opportunities for Action 2022 - 2026



## Related USFS Activities

### STILLMEADOW PEACE PARK

#### *Improving Social, Environmental, & Economic Wellbeing by Partnering with Faith-based Leaders*

Stillmeadow Peace Park & Forest is an innovative model partnership with faith-based leaders working to encourage environmental, economic, and social wellbeing in communities through urban forest stewardship. In collaboration with Stillmeadow Community Fellowship Church, USDA Forest Service's Research and Development branch is supporting the development of best practices, standards, and models to support healthy forests and local communities threatened by forest stressors through a shared stewardship model.

The Park & Forest is 10 acres of forest land and a stream owned by Stillmeadow Community Fellowship Church in the heart of southwest Baltimore. Programming includes: 1) an organic apiary, community gardens, and orchard, 2) trails and meditation areas to address the recreational, mental, and physical health of the community; and 3) community-based research and citizen science-based activities with children, youth, and adults to improve forest and watershed health by investigating park biota and hydrology in urban settings.



Photo Credit: Morgan Grove



Photo Credit: Asia Jones

### SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY AND A&M

#### *Creating a Diverse Workforce through Urban Forestry Education*

In 1992 Southern University and Agricultural & Mechanical College (A&M), a Historically Black College & University (HBCU), established the nation's first Bachelor of Science in Urban Forestry degree program with support from the USDA Forest Service. That continued partnership supported the establishment of Master of Science and Ph.D. Urban Forestry degree programs, and in 2020 the Department achieved the significant milestone of becoming the first Urban Forestry Bachelor's Degree program accredited by the Society of American Foresters (SAF). The partnership with USFS includes an internship component with numerous partners including recently the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. "This partnership between the Wisconsin DNR and Southern University reflects the USDA Forest Service's mission to promote diversity and inclusion by creating a diverse workforce as we seek to grow the next generation of conservation stewards that reflect our society," said Beatra Wilson, Assistant Director of Cooperative Forestry.



Photo Credit: Michael Leff

### VIBRANT CITIES LAB

#### *Merging the Latest Research with Best Practices for Green Infrastructure*

Vibrant Cities Lab is a joint project of the U.S. Forest Service, American Forests and the National Association of Regional Councils, merging the latest research with best practices for implementing green infrastructure projects in communities across the country. It aims to help city managers, policymakers, and advocates build thriving urban forest programs and increase awareness of the diverse benefits that trees can provide. Its tools includes: i-Tree, a state-of-the-art, peer-reviewed software suite from the USDA Forest Service that provides urban and rural forestry analysis and benefits assessment tools, and STEW-MAP, that surveys civic groups who work to conserve, manage, monitor, transform, educate on and/or advocate for the environment across a defined city, region, or landscape.

## STAY IN TOUCH!



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Website | <https://www.fs.usda.gov/managing-land/urban-forests/ucf/nucfac>

*This report and its findings were produced by the Institute for Engagement and Negotiation at the University of Virginia. This institution is an equal opportunity provider.*