

# Wisconsin DNR Urban Forestry Inflation Reduction Act Grants

## Frequently Asked Questions

### Eligibility

#### **What kinds of projects are eligible that are not within identified disadvantaged communities?**

If it's "on the ground work" (such as site prep, tree planting, removal, or maintenance), it **must** take place in those identified disadvantaged communities.

If it's a project that is not geographically based (e.g., an educational opportunity or workforce development project), it must be clearly articulated how the primary beneficiaries are intended to be members of the identified disadvantaged communities. It would help to demonstrate your intention by describing the area(s) of focus and identifying with whom you are working to market or produce the work.

1. Extreme heat mitigation
2. Proactive maintenance
3. Site preparation
4. Tree planting and establishment
5. Urban food forests
6. Urban wood utilization
7. Planning
8. Training
9. Education, Information, and Outreach
10. Workforce development



If work takes place in identified disadvantaged communities (DACs)

Above, or if significant focus on DACs and community engagement

Above, or if primary participants from DACs

#### **Are city-wide projects (e.g., management plans, inventories) eligible?**

If the community has significant areas identified as disadvantaged, then planning and policy development is eligible, provided there is a focus on disadvantaged communities and there is a community engagement component. For example, perhaps an application for an urban forestry management plan includes community engagement, strategies for improving service to disadvantaged communities, and additional monies to implement some of the plan in those areas. See Appendix F or in the application guidance document for more information about these types of projects.

#### **What if parts of a project are in disadvantaged communities, and some are not?**

As noted in a previous question, all tree and land focused work has to take place in identified DACs to receive funding. Activities not tied to tree work or land prep may be eligible if there's a significant focus on disadvantaged communities. See "Eligible Projects and Activities" and Appendix F in the application guidance document for more information.

**Is tree removal permitted? If so, under what parameters?**

Removal of trees is allowed when, by doing so, the long-term sustainability of the urban forest canopy is improved. Removed trees should be replaced within the grant period at a minimum rate of 1:1, meaning there should be at least 1 tree planted for every tree removed, though ideally higher. The new trees should be in the vicinity of the removed ones where possible, and always within the disadvantaged community. See Appendix F in the application guidance document for more information.

**If a park or similar property is adjacent to a DAC and serves those residents, is the park eligible for tree work?**

Unfortunately, no.

**If an area of my city is not in the DAC map, can I appeal?**

Unfortunately, there is no mechanism to appeal.

**Can partners from outside the eligibility area help with the project?**

Yes. However, ensure the work occurs in a disadvantaged area (or serves a disadvantaged population) as discussed above. Additionally, partners within the project area are strongly encouraged.

**If a project focuses on youth from disadvantaged populations, but takes place outside the identified DACs, would the project be eligible?**

Tree planting or maintenance would **not** be eligible, though perhaps activities related to education or workforce development would be eligible, provided that the activities are urban forestry in nature.

**For workforce development projects, do potential employees, interns, or apprentices need to come from identified DACs? If so, how is that tracked or reported?**

If necessary, for workforce development purposes, it is permissible to use a local definition of disadvantaged, such as using income levels, to recruit those staff, provided there's a good faith effort to recruit from identified DACs (see below). We do not yet know how workforce development items will need to be reported, but neither the Forest Service nor the DNR is going to police people's addresses, though you may need to report something like employees' zip codes. Additionally, you will need to explain and justify that the recruitment / selection process aligns with the goals of the IRA funding.

**For projects like education and outreach or workforce development that take place outside the DACs, how does one prove or show that the focus is on residents from those areas?**

It can help to show your intent by your partnerships with local organizations which are active within the DACs. You could, for example, partner with a neighborhood association, church or school within the DAC(s) to develop and/or advertise your project. While we do not yet know the Forest Service's reporting requirements, it may be helpful to document your participants' general locations, like their zip codes, or the physical addresses of a church or school you are partnering with.

**If tribal land falls outside of the officially disadvantaged areas, will they be eligible if most of the tribe is officially disadvantaged?**

Yes, all tribal lands are considered disadvantaged and thus projects there would be eligible, provided that it is urban forestry in nature.

**Can you clarify which activities would be considered site preparation (an eligible project) and those that would be construction (an ineligible project)?**

Concrete removal needed for installation of trees is an allowable site preparation expense. The purchase and installation of soil cells designed to improve root growth conditions under pavement is also an allowable expense. Concrete installation over soils cells is NOT an eligible expense.

## **Ranking**

**How are applications going to be ranked?**

See the Ranking Criteria in the [application guidance document](#).

High scoring projects will have some characteristics shared between them. They will:

- Clearly describe the anticipated long-term benefits to the tree canopy
- Clearly describe how the project positively benefits people/areas that could most benefit from urban forestry
- Establish or continue meaningful relationships with community partners
- Demonstrate the applicant's ability and capacity to accomplish project goals

All projects will, by definition, benefit disadvantaged communities. Presenting additional evidence of community burdens (for example, describing the cumulative burdens an area faces, like low-income *and* flooding risk *and* higher temperatures) will be taken into consideration in reviewers' holistic review. But the location of the work does not cancel out the quality of the application and the ability of the organization to see it through.

**Does it rank better to work with one or more partners?**

There is a strong emphasis with these grants to continue or develop partnerships. Though relationships with those partners should be mutually beneficial and intended to exist throughout and beyond the grant period.

**Is the USFS involved in the ranking process?**

No, applications are ranked and monies awarded through the Wisconsin DNR. However, the DNR must stay within USFS eligibility and activity guidelines, and the DNR must report to them.

**All other things being equal, will projects targeting more highly disadvantaged areas generally be viewed more favorably than projects that are minimally disadvantaged?**

Yes.

**When making your decisions regarding the monetary amount awarded do you intend to consider the number of people in disadvantaged communities who will benefit from the project?**

This will be taken into consideration, but there is no set proportionality.

### Interpreting DAC maps

**What are the geographic units in the map of disadvantaged communities?**

These are Census tracts and block groups, geographic units that the federal government uses to track different things like demographic and economic information, and pollution levels.

**My community shows an eligible area on the map from the DNR, but the [Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool](#) does not show the same area as eligible. How can I get clarification on this?**

The Wisconsin opportunity also incorporates areas that are in the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile or above for a range of environmental indexes in the Environmental Protection Agency's [EJScreen](#). If the area was not identified as disadvantaged in CEJST, but is on the DNR's map, then it was identified as disadvantaged within EJScreen.

**For the identified communities on Wisconsin's map that note that they have an index that exceeds the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile on [EJScreen](#), is it only certain indexes that count? Is that percentile number compared to the state or compared to the US?**

Any Census block group that is at or exceeds the 90th percentile for the Environmental Justice or Supplemental Indexes would be eligible, and it's compared against the state. The two sets of indexes include a pollutant as well as social, demographic or economic data.

### Application

**Can additional documentation be added to the grant application?**

Appendices to elaborate on any given application question are generally discouraged, though relevant project elements such as maps or species lists are encouraged. Additionally, letters of collaboration from project partners should be included. The DNR does not need or desire letters from entities not involved in the project.

**What is the difference between a manual and automated accounting system?**

A manual accounting system keeps financial records by hand rather than on a computer. Typically, you enter transactions into a paper spreadsheet or a ledger, using a calculator to do any calculations. Automated and computerized accounting systems use software to manage bookkeeping records.

**If an applicant is partnering with a nonprofit and the nonprofit is billing for labor and/or supplies, how should that be captured on the application?** Include nonprofit as a project partner (Section III, D) and include a Letter of Collaboration. Also, include the estimated cost for services and/or supplies to be invoiced by the nonprofit on the Cost Estimate Worksheet.

## **Impact / Accomplishment Reporting**

### **What information will be needed for reporting to the DNR or to the Forest Service?**

Financial reporting will be regularly required (see [application guide](#)). As for impact or accomplishment reporting, we do not yet know what the reporting criteria are, but the Forest Service is developing an online platform for it. IRA funded grant projects will be asked to use this platform and comply with future impact reporting requirements. We anticipate that awardees will be asked for geographic location of all work completed and the type of work occurring at events and locations, though we do not know how granular input will need to be.

## **Multi-phase projects**

**How should an applicant articulate a multi-phase project in the application when later phases are dependent on results from early stages? For example, phase 1 is a tree inventory, phase 2 is a management plan, and phase 3 is implementation (planting, pruning, etc.) in disadvantaged communities.**

Write specifically about phase 1 and more generally about later phases, noting that specifics would be determined by phase 1. Because of the need to provide monetary estimates, it may be in the applicants' best interest to conduct a rough, pre-application assessment of the community or area of interest in order to best forecast future work. With the above example, perhaps a windshield survey of trees conducted before application submission could inform estimates of future tree plantings or maintenance.

## **Money**

**Can an advanced payment go towards a down payment on a service or a supply? For example, paying for a tree that's still at a nursery for a year or two.**

Yes, grantee should have a written contract with vendor or consultant.

**What is the anticipated time between the submission of the reimbursement request and payment?**

Estimated at 30 days. This will vary depending on completeness of paperwork and volume of reimbursements.

**What if DNR doesn't spend all \$4 million? Will there be another opportunity?**

We anticipate all \$4 million to be spent during this opportunity.

**What if a grantee doesn't spend all the money?**

It needs to be spent. We cannot give money back to the federal government, nor can we re-award the funds to other entities. We strongly encourage applicants to be realistic with their estimates and their capacity. Additionally, we strongly encourage you to be in communication with your regional [Urban Forestry Coordinator](#) during the application process, and during the project, if awarded.

**Can funds be used for interns, youth apprentices, or seasonal camp counselors, provided the work is urban forestry in nature?**

Yes.

## **Miscellaneous**

**Do vendors/contractors/consultants working with grantees on their projects need a UEI or SAM registration?**

No.

**Can non-501(c)3 organizations be part of the grant as a sub-grantee?**

These organizations can be partners of the applicant, but not an applicant themselves. If the applicant wishes to contract with the non-501(c)3 organization in some way, that's permitted, just like if it was a private business.

**For projects across jurisdictions, is it better to go through a 501(c)3 or the municipality when working with many partners and MOUs?**

Anyone can be the applicant. Use letters of collaboration to specify each partner's role and get those signed by each partner. From a fiscal point of view, whoever holds the grant, the expenditures need to come through that entity.

**How broadly do your competitive procurement requirements apply? E.g., yes to selection of consultants, but no to purchase of trees? See response below regarding procurement.**

**The federal policy points back to what is reasonable based on State level. Our state has requirements on "Public Construction", of which consultants are exempt from. Correct? This relates to procurement policy.** See response below regarding procurement.

Questions regarding procurement should be directed to the grant applicant. It is the responsibility of the grant applicant to comply with all applicable local, state and federal contract and bidding

requirements. If the grant applicant is unsure, they should consult their legal counsel with detailed questions regarding compliance with bidding and contracting laws.

The Department can provide guidance – See:

<https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/sites/default/files/topic/Aid/grants/ProcurementGuide.pdf> and [Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards \(2 CFR Part 200\) \[exit DNR\]](#)(most procurement found in 200.318-327)

Again, subrecipients should consult their attorney with detailed questions regarding compliance with bidding laws. DNR personnel are not qualified or authorized to provide legal advice to grant applicants or consultants concerning bidding laws.