



Urban Forest Programs

The Challenge

For the 80 percent of Americans who live in urban environments, urban trees and green spaces have profoundly positive effects on their communities — improving health, reducing levels of stress and crime, cleaning the air, reducing flooding and even raising property values. But these invaluable resources are under constant threat. Shrinking city budgets, combined with urban expansion, invasive pests and the effects of climate change, are taking a significant toll on our nation's urban forests. Making matters worse, many residents and municipal leaders don't understand the tremendous value these forests provide.

Purpose

American Forests Urban Forest programs raise awareness about the tremendous environmental, social and economic benefits of urban trees and other green infrastructure, working with communities across the nation to expand and care for urban forests.

Program Overview

American Forests Urban Forest programs have three principal areas of focus: (1) Community ReLeaf, a program that directly assists communities in expanding their urban forests; (2) public outreach and education, to help the public gain greater awareness of the benefits of urban forests; and (3) spotlighting innovation and excellence to help the national urban forest community advance and integrate with other disciplines.

COMMUNITY RELEAF

With initial support from Bank of America and the U.S. Forest Service, American Forests launched a new flagship initiative in 2013 called **American Forests Community ReLeaf** to help cities across the nation improve their urban forests. The program provides both technical and financial resources to municipal and nonprofit partners to expand and maintain tree canopy cover, while engaging and educating the local community.

The three phases of Community ReLeaf include:

Phase One: *Urban Tree Canopy Analysis* — When appropriate, American Forests conducts a detailed scientific analysis of the existing tree canopy in a given community and provides a detailed assessment of the area's forest structure and impact.

Phase Two: *Green Space Improvement* — Using the data, we work with our local partners to identify areas lacking tree canopy, with priority given to underserved neighborhoods. We then work with local partners and landscape architects to design high-impact, site-specific greening projects.

Phase Three: *Outreach and Policy* — We engage schools, civic leaders and the general public in Community ReLeaf cities through volunteer tree planting events, public meetings, classroom activities, policy initiatives and more.



Maryland GovPics

American Forests Mission:

Our mission is to restore threatened forest ecosystems and inspire people to value and protect our urban and wildland forests.



Impact: In the first two years of the program, Community ReLeaf projects have been launched in 11 cities from coast to coast: Asbury Park, N.J.; Atlanta; Austin; Chicago; Detroit (two projects); Hartford, Conn.; Miami; Nashville; Oakland; Pasadena, Calif.; and Washington, D.C. These projects have already engaged hundreds of community residents, planted thousands of trees and set in motion projects that will benefit these cities for decades to come.

PUBLIC OUTREACH AND EDUCATION

American Forests has championed urban forests for over 40 years. Today, our efforts include national media campaigns, social media outreach, magazine stories, urban forest “Walkabouts” and more. In recent years, we implemented an extensive process to identify “10 Best Cities for Urban Forests” and published “**Urban Forests Case Studies: Challenges, Potential and Success in a Dozen Cities**” as grant projects with the U.S. Forest Service.

Impact: As a result of our efforts, stories about urban forests have appeared in media outlets like USA Today, the Seattle Times, Denver Post, CNN online, NPR and ABC radio in the last three years alone. Having distributed more than 5,000 of the case study books with models for success, these publications have also proven very popular as resources for local experts, city foresters and municipal policymakers.

INNOVATION & EXCELLENCE

In partnership with the U.S. Forest Service’s Urban Technology and Science Delivery Team, we are developing a new resource-rich website to connect urban forest practitioners with other disciplines on the forefront of urban sustainability and resilience, creating an online community of innovators who are implementing high-impact projects in urban communities nationwide.

Opportunities for Collaboration and Partnership

American Forests is seeking partners and resources to enhance our effectiveness in all of these areas:

- Expanding Community ReLeaf to more than 20 cities by 2020
- Creating innovative green community spaces on underutilized properties
- Building a dynamic online resource for city planners, managers, engineers, developers, public health officials and others to access data, best practices and innovative models that help integrate urban forests into broader social, environmental and economic objectives

Lead Supporters: Bank of America, Alliance Data, U.S. Forest Service, Tree Canada, and IKEA.

Supporting information:

USA Today article – ‘10 Best Cities for Urban Forests’
Examples of Urban Forestry assessment reports:
<http://www.americanforests.org/CommunityReLeaf>

For further information contact Ian Leahy, ileahy@americanforests.org.