# TREE EQUITY HANDBOOK



PRESENTED BY:

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American Forests™

Arbor Day Foundation™

# Tree Equity Handbook

## A Practical Guide to Closing the Canopy Gap Between Neighborhoods
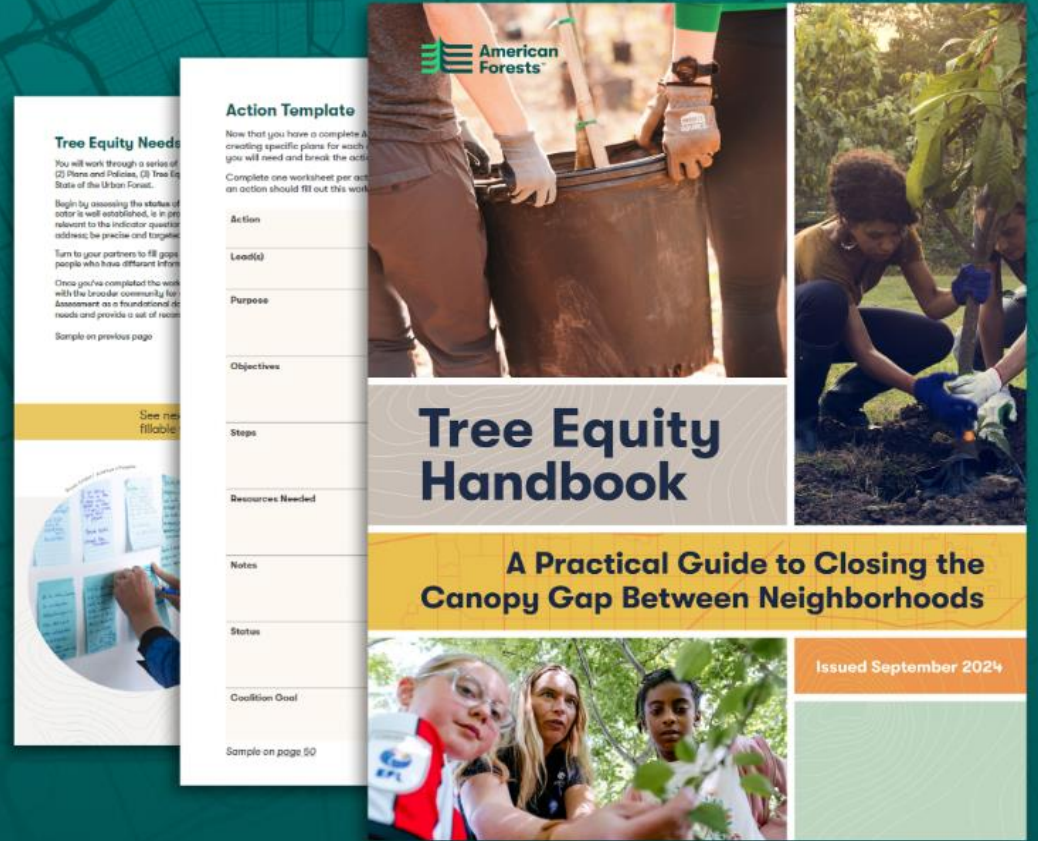


| Handbook Overview | 01 Collect Baseline Data | 02 Build an Inclusive Coalition | 03 Coalition Action Planning | 04 Create Plans and Policies ON THE WAY | 05 Fund your Program ON THE WAY | 06 Grow, Plant, Maintain & Reuse Trees ON THE WAY | 07 Develop a Workforce ON THE WAY |

# Toolkit

## 01

## Collect Baseline Data

Begin your Tree Equity journey by establishing a strong data foundation. In this toolkit, you'll use Tree Equity Score to gather data about trees in your community, identify areas with the greatest need and set priorities for the future.

**Explore**
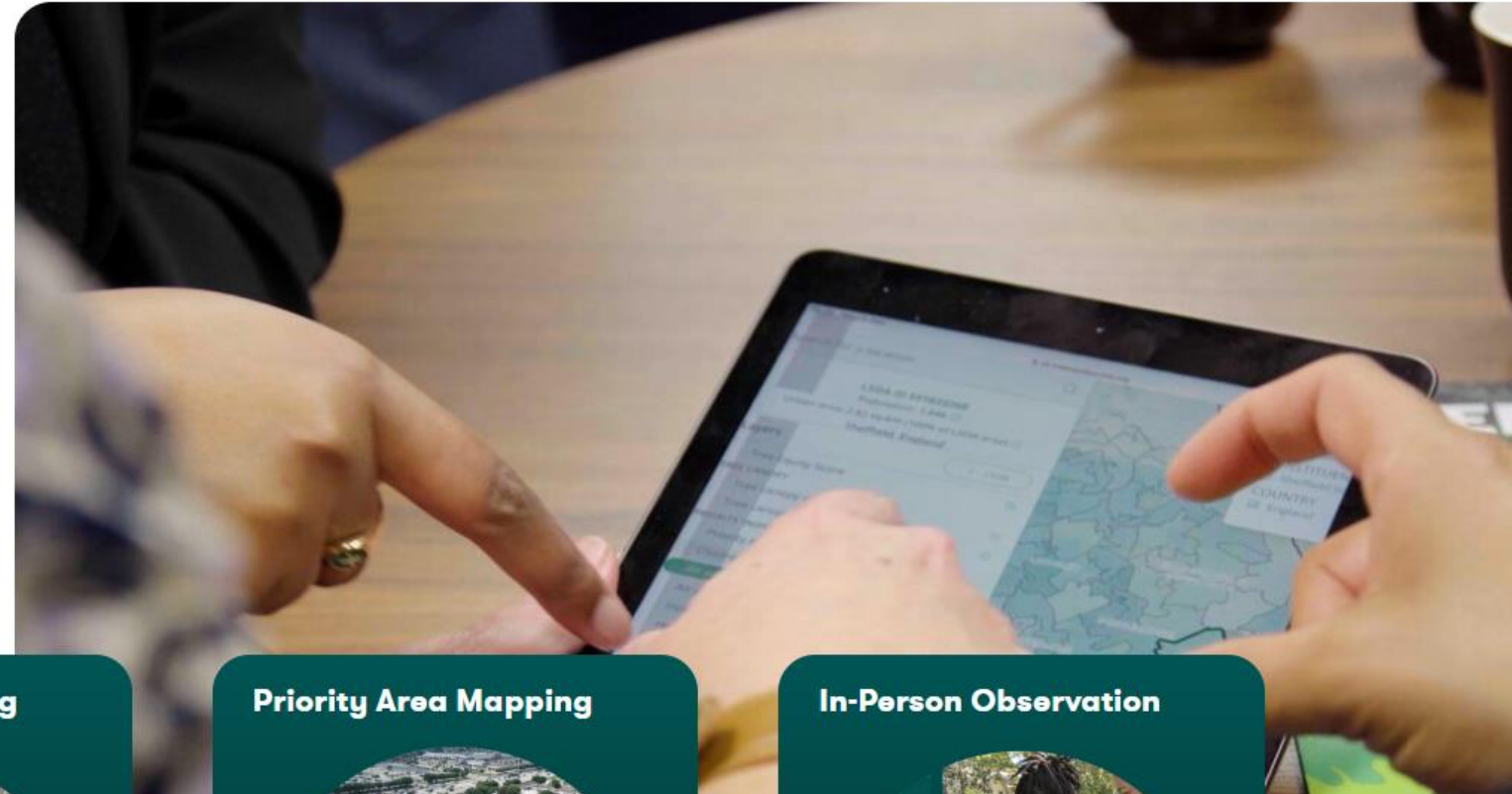
**FEATURED ACTIVITIES**


**Basic Data Gathering**


**Priority Area Mapping**


**In-Person Observation**

## Gather Overview Metrics

The overview metrics in Tree Equity Score Location Insights reports provide valuable data on overall community characteristics. These metrics will be useful in grant proposals, project reports, presentations and various other contexts as foundational information.

1. Click on any block group within your geographic area to generate a list of related reports. These will appear in the top right, under "Find a location..." (top right).

2. Select the report appropriate for the scale you work at — city/town, county, congressional district or state. This will open a Location Insights report.

3. Gather metrics from the "Summary" section at the top of the report. Enter the summary metrics into the **Basic Data Gathering Worksheet** ([page 19](#)).



### Sample Overview Metrics

Location Name: **Buffalo, NY**

| | |
|---|---|
| Urban area population: **278,337** | Children (0–17): **22%** |
| Tree canopy cover: **19%** | Seniors (65+): **13%** |
| People in poverty: **48%** | Linguistic isolation: **5%** |
| People of color: **55%** | Average health burden index: **49** |
| Unemployment: **8%** | Neighborhoods below 100: **97%** |

See fillable worksheet on [page 19](#)

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## Neighborhood Field Notes Worksheet

On-site visits are best done when leaves on trees are fully developed — depending on your location, this is typically late spring, summer, and early fall. Make observations with all five senses. Don't forget to take tree canopy photos! Save them with your field notes, giving them names or labels that include the date and location.

| Block Group ID and Neighborhood Name: | Tree Equity Score: |
|---|---|
| | Tree Canopy Cover: |
| Address or Street(s) Visited: | Date & Time Visited: |

**Describe the types of development you see**

☐ Single-Family Residences  ☐ Multi-Family Residences  ☐ Commercial Uses  ☐ Industry  ☐ Recreation
☐ Institutional Grounds (e.g., hospitals, schools, government or corporate campuses, places of worship)
Notes:

**Describe the canopy coverage (select all that apply)**

☐ Abundant  ☐ Lush  ☐ Continuous  ☐ Moderate  ☐ Patchy  ☐ Sparse  ☐ Fragmented  ☐ Isolated
Notes:

**Describe the size of urban trees (select all that apply)**

☐ Large  ☐ Moderate  ☐ Small  ☐ Young  ☐ Mature
Notes:

**Describe the environmental conditions for people (select all that apply)**

☐ Shady  ☐ Sheltered  ☐ Pleasant  ☐ Lush  ☐ Green  ☐ Exposed  ☐ Barren  ☐ Desolate
☐ Calm  ☐ Busy  ☐ Quiet  ☐ Noisy  ☐ Natural aromas  ☐ Chemical odors  ☐ Vehicle odors
Notes:

**Describe tree health conditions (select all that apply)**

☐ Dry  ☐ Leaf discoloration  ☐ Wilting  ☐ Sparse foliage  ☐ Broken branches  ☐ Dead limbs
☐ Exposed roots  ☐ Insect infestation  ☐ Stunted growth  ☐ Bark damage  ☐ Strangling vines
☐ Green and vibrant  ☐ New growth  ☐ Healthy bark  ☐ Flowering
Notes:

**Temperature**  ☐ Surface Temp (infrared thermometer)  ☐ Air Temp (digital thermometer)

**Full shade reading(s):**  **Full sun reading(s):**

## 02

# Build an Inclusive Coalition

Urban forests are managed by and for people. They thrive on collaboration. In this toolkit, you will follow a step-by-step process to bring together diverse, credible and vocal members of a dynamic coalition that will activate a community-wide vision for people and forests.

**Explore**

**FEATURED ACTIVITIES**

**Stakeholder Inventory and Map**

**Community Partner Cultivation**

**Coalition Roadmap**

## Left panel — Press Release (annotated)

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Geographic area →

Anchor organization →

Coalition name →

**New Tree Equity Initiative to Take on Severe Heat in Arborvale.**

Arborvale – July 16, 2025

Key local issues that align with Tree Equity →

Key partner →

Arborvale is proud to announce its ambitious Tree Equity Initiative, a groundbreaking effort to leverage green infrastructure toward reducing heat impacts across the city while advancing equity and quality of life. Spear-headed by the City of Arborvale Urban Forestry Department and Green Community Alliance, this initiative aims to ensure that the cooling and shading benefits of trees are delivered equitably to Arborvale's residents, regardless of their location or socioeconomic status.

Mission Statement →

Statement of support →

Spokes-person →

"We're confident we can make strides to protect residents in Arborvale during severe heat waves, if we all find ways to work together," says Mayor Arun Patel. Trees are critical infrastructure in the community and serve a vital role in enhancing quality of life and health. In addition to providing natural heat mitigation, trees also reduce flooding, beautify the community and support the physical and mental health of residents.

Supporting evidence to communicate key issues →

While parts of Arborvale have ample tree canopy, tree cover is not distributed equitably. According to Tree Equity Score, a dataset developed by American Forests that measures Tree Equity in cities nationwide, neighborhoods in Arborvale with the lowest poverty rates (20th percentile) have on average 63% more tree canopy than neighborhoods with the highest rates (80th percentile). Moreover, the coolest areas of Arborvale have 2.5 times more canopy than the hottest areas.

Supporting Tree Equity Score data →

The Tree Equity Initiative envisions a future where a resilient and equitable urban forest canopy reduces the life-threatening impacts of severe heat throughout Arborvale.

Vision statement →

**Our Goals:**

Coalition goals →

1. Attain a citywide tree canopy coverage of 32% by 2050, prioritizing implementation in neighborhoods with a Tree Equity Score below 85.

Timeline →

2. Allocate resources to urban forestry operations in under-resourced neighborhoods.

3. Create workforce and career development opportunities.

4. Maximize heat resilience for street trees and in green spaces and transportation corridors.

The initiative will start by prioritizing the following actions: (1) creating public-private partnerships to expand urban greenery on institutional and transportation land uses, (2) seeking sustainable funding for Tree Equity programs, (3) appointing two dedicated staff members for Tree Equity within the Urban Forestry Department, and (4) training an urban forestry workforce and expanding career opportunities with programs specifically designed to serve under-resourced residents.

Key priorities →

"Our commitment to Tree Equity is a commitment to quality of life for our residents," emphasizes Mayor Patel. "By achieving these goals, we not only improve our environment but also improve safety and create economic opportunities for residents."

Statement of support →

About [Organization/Agency Name]:

For more information, contact:
Office of the Mayor
Phone: 000-000-0000
Email: mayor@email.gov
Follow us on Twitter/X: @city_of_arborvale

## Right panel — Stakeholder Map Worksheet

# Stakeholder Map Worksheet

**Level of Influence** (vertical axis)

**CULTIVATE/INVOLVE**
(High Influence, Low Interest)

**KEY STAKEHOLDERS TO ENABLE/MANAGE**
(High Influence, High Interest)

**INFORM**
(Low Influence, Low Interest)

**COLLABORATE/ENABLE**
(Low Influence, High Interest)

**Level of Interest or Stake in Outcome** (horizontal axis)

# 03

## Coalition Action Planning

Achieving Tree Equity is a crucial — and enormous — undertaking. This toolkit will guide you through a collaborative process to form a Coalition Action Plan that operationalizes your goals and reflects the community's needs, priorities and contributions.

**Explore**

**FEATURED ACTIVITIES**

**Community Engagement Plan**

**Tree Equity Needs Assessment**

**Coalition Action Plan**

**Your Coalition Action Plan should include:**

- ☐ A completed Plan Overview
- ☐ Tree Equity Commitment or letter of support (see Toolkit 2)
- ☐ List of Tree Equity Coalition Core Team members
- ☐ List of all organizations involved with the Tree Equity Coalition
- ☐ Summary of priority neighborhoods identified in Tree Equity Score (see Toolkit 1)
- ☐ Neighborhood Profiles summarizing community insights
- ☐ Summary of findings on current conditions and activities evaluated in the Tree Equity Needs Assessment
  - ☐ Urban Forestry Activities
  - ☐ Plans and Policies
  - ☐ Tree Equity Initiatives
  - ☐ Community Engagement
  - ☐ State of the Urban Forest
- ☐ A completed Action Playbook
- ☐ All complete Action Templates
- ☐ A summary or link to your Community Engagement Plan

## Sample Action Playbook

**Goal 1:** Center community needs and preferences in the decisions and management of the urban forest.

| Priority | Actions Needed | Potential Leads/Partners |
|---|---|---|
| Establish an independent organization as an **anchor institution** whose role is to drive and mobilize urban forestry initiatives. | Formalize the role through a non-binding Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or a legally binding Cooperative Agreement. | |
| | Secure funding to establish a new role at the anchor organization to project manage and mobilize the initiative. | |
| Develop an **urban forest management plan with a Tree Equity framework** that explicitly focuses resources on neighborhoods with fewer trees and greater vulnerability to climate change. | Develop a formal process to conduct community engagement and gather input to inform the urban forest management plan. | |
| | Develop a 30-year funding strategy. | |
| | Create Urban Forest Management Plan. | |
| **Monitor and evaluate program progress** toward achieving Tree Equity objectives. | Develop a review protocol with clear monitoring metrics that can be implemented biannually. | |
| | Establish feedback mechanisms to gather input from stakeholders, including residents, community groups, and partners. | |

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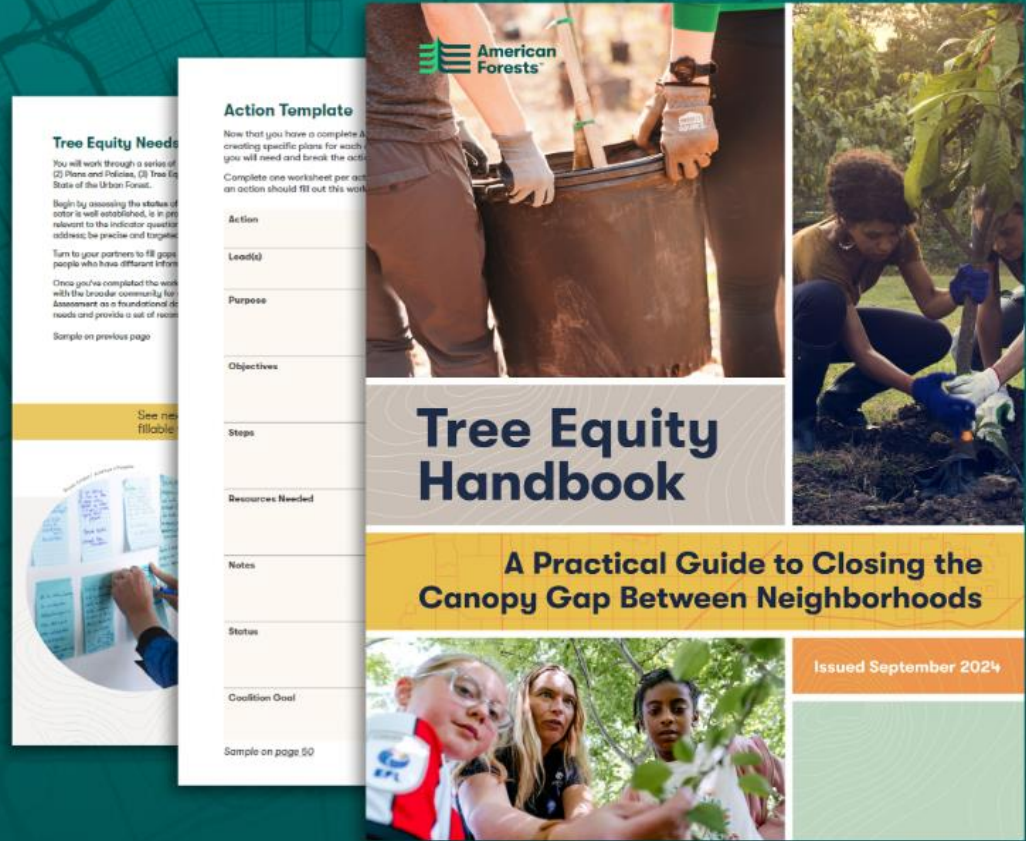
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# Thank you.

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