

**RHODE ISLAND'S GUIDE TO
TREE CITY USA CERTIFICATION,
RECERTIFICATION & GROWTH AWARD
APPLICATIONS**

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW



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WELCOME TO TREE CITY USA!

Participating in the Arbor Day Foundation's (ADF) Tree City USA program represents a significant commitment to the management of your community's urban forest resource. The Division of Forest Environment's (DFE) [Urban & Community Forestry Program \(U&CF\)](#)¹ can provide your community with technical and educational programming to develop a sustainable community forestry program.

This Tree City USA application guide contains instructions and the worksheets necessary for Tree City USA Certification, Recertification and the Growth Award application process. The requirements of each of the four standards are outlined as well as helpful ideas and procedures to make the process as simple as possible.

Whether you are a community new to the Tree City USA program or you are a new individual responsible for applying for recertification and/or a Growth Award, this guide is meant to outline and explain the information necessary for a successful application. Please take the time to carefully read through the information.

Your application must be done on-line through the [Tree City USA On-line Portal](#)². Follow the instructions. If you have issues with signing in, the application process, or the on-line portal, there is on-line help as well as an option to contact the Arbor Day Foundation for additional assistance. They are swift to respond to requests.

If you have any questions regarding what information is needed for the documentation accompanying your application, please contact the Rhode Island [Urban & Community Forestry \(U&CF\) Program](#)¹.

All websites mentioned in this document can be found on page 8.

In order to allow time for U&CF to review your application and approve it, prior to ADF final review and approval:

***ALL APPLICATIONS ARE DUE BY
DECEMBER 15.***

TREE CITY USA STANDARDS

To obtain [Tree City USA](#)³ status, a community must meet four standards: a tree board or department; a tree care ordinance; a community forestry program; and an Arbor Day observance and proclamation. These standards “provide the structure your community needs to launch a successful urban forestry program” (*Tree City USA: Greening America*, The National Arbor Day Foundation). The standards, as defined by the Arbor Day Foundation, are:

Standard 1: A Tree Board or Department

In a typical city, many trees are on public property – along streets, in parks, and around public buildings. The city is legally responsible for the care of those trees. A Tree City USA has a volunteer tree board, commission, or city department designated by ordinance to be involved with community tree care.

Standard 2: A Tree Care Ordinance

Some communities may already have a tree care ordinance in place but, if not, the creation of an ordinance that establishes a tree board or department and outlines its responsibilities, such as developing and implementing a community forestry work plan, is required. The tree care ordinance provides clear guidance for planting, acceptable pruning practices, maintenance and removal of trees from streets, parks and other public places. A basic sample ordinance can be found [here](#)⁴.

Standard 3: A Community Forestry Program

A Tree City USA has an active community forestry program, evidenced by an annual budget of at least \$2 per capita. The program addresses dead and hazardous tree removal, pruning, planting, watering and fertilizing, and insect and disease control. This may seem like an impossible barrier to small communities, but a little investigation usually shows that more than this amount is already being spent by the community on its trees. See page 2 for a complete list of acceptable spending.

Standard 4: An Arbor Day Observance and Proclamation

A Tree City USA proclaims and observes Arbor Day. The benefits of Arbor Day go far beyond the shade and beauty of new trees for future generations to enjoy. Arbor Day is an opportunity to earn publicity for your community and to educate citizens about proper tree care and the value of community trees. This is the least challenging and probably the most enjoyable standard to accomplish. The community issues a mayoral (or equivalent) Arbor Day proclamation and sponsors or participates in an Arbor Day observance. The types of celebrations can range from a simple tree planting event to an all-week observance.

Many communities celebrate their Arbor Day in conjunction with the National Arbor Day (the last Friday in April), as does the state of Rhode Island, but you can celebrate your Arbor Day any time of year. If you choose to plant trees at your celebration, a fall Arbor Day observance is recommended.

Tree City USA Qualifying Expenditures

What Counts Towards \$2 Per Capita Spending On Trees?

The following expenses for public tree care (street, park, cemetery) may be counted towards the \$2 per capita requirement of Standard 3. [Grant funds received to fund any of these activities can be included as a qualifying expenditure.]

PEOPLE and SUPPORT

- Administrative time
- Staff salaries and benefits (documented portion thereof) to accomplish the tasks listed below
- Insurance
- Memberships in and donation to tree organizations
- Tree board salary (most are volunteer, some may be paid)
- Tree care conferences and workshops attended by community workers and/or volunteers

TREE MANAGEMENT

- Computer inventory software
- Survey or inventory expenses
- Development or update of Management Plans or Ordinances

TREE WORK

- Contract work
- Equipment maintenance
- Equipment purchases (large equipment can be depreciated over life span)
- Equipment rental (chipper, bucket truck, stump grinder, etc.)
- Fertilizing
- Insect control on trees
- Mulching
- Stump and root removal
- Tree moving/relocation
- Tree pruning costs (excluding utility pruning)
- Tree purchases and planting
- Tree removal (excluding utility removals)
- Watering (Installation and Maintenance of irrigation systems does not qualify)

LIMITED QUALIFYING EXPENDITURES

- Chipping (maximum of \$0.50 per capita)
- Pick-up and/or chipping of tree trimmings from private properties (max. \$0.50 per capita)
- Utility Line Clearance:** Utility expenses are allowed only if the utility is a partner in the city's tree program and has implemented a tree planting program and proper pruning methods as recommended in the Tree Line USA program. If your program meets this requirement, you can report up to **\$1** per capita for utility pruning and \$1 per capita for utility removals.

EVENTS & OUTREACH

- Arbor Day program
- Prizes for Arbor Day contests
- Public education materials – brochures, newsletters, etc.
- Volunteer labor/time (see description on next page for rates)
- Value of donated materials (including trees)

Items NOT eligible toward Tree City USA per capita spending

- Lawn mowing
- Leaf pick-up
- Tree work on non-public property
- Weed and brush control not related to planting areas (i.e. rights-of-way, etc).

Calculating the Value of Donations

Value Standards for Donations for certification and recertification are calculated automatically within the web application. The value allowed for donated labor changes yearly and is based on the national value assessed by the [Independent Sector](#)⁵.

Types of volunteer work:

1. Laborer
Provides unskilled, manual labor such as site preparation, planting, watering, mulching, data gathering or entry, surveying for insects and diseases, pruning, bookkeeping and clerical work, etc.
2. Project Coordinator and Tree Board Members
Coordinates the project or significant aspects thereof. This might include project planning, recruiting and training workers, arranging for supplies or facilities, scheduling workers or activities, etc.
3. Expert
Provides expert information or assistance to the project. Individuals in this capacity must have training or experience in the particular field of expertise. The value of volunteer hours for experts can be customary rates for services provided.

Planning ahead to document volunteer numbers and time means having sign-in sheets available. Several sample volunteer sign-in sheets can be found on pages 9-11.

***APPLICATIONS ARE DUE BY
DECEMBER 15***

Tree City USA Application Guidelines

Contact Information:

- Provide the correct name, title, and contact information for each person listed. While some people fill multiple roles, please provide at least **two** different contact names (email and phone) besides the Mayor:
 - Mayor
 - City Forestry Contact - the person within the community that has direct knowledge of the community's urban forestry program, often also the community representative or liaison with the Tree Board.
 - Portal Login Contact - the person completing the application (i.e. responsible for completing all forms and supplemental documentation). This is the person the RI U&CF program Coordinator will contact with questions regarding the application or documentation.
 - Tree Board Chairperson – the actual contact information for the chair of the board should be provided.

Standard 1: Tree Board or Department Form

- Provide the name of the tree board or commission or department.
- List the names of all the tree board members – titles or affiliations are helpful

Standard 2: Community Tree Ordinance

- Upload a copy of the tree ordinance **only** if you are a first-time applicant or you have revised your existing ordinance.

Standard 3: Budget Expenditures

You must enter this information onto the portal. Make sure you also have your community population number and the total number of volunteer hours before you start.

Standard 4

Arbor Day Observance – *This is a yearly occurrence*

- Provide date of Arbor Day observance
- Limit documentation to 2-4 pieces.
- Documentation can include:
 - Newspaper articles about the event;
 - Pictures of event (please use captions where possible);
 - Program booklet or agenda;
 - City meeting announcements;
 - Tree board meeting minutes;
 - Type-written page describing the day's events.

Arbor Day Proclamation – *This is a yearly occurrence.*

- The proclamation should be on city letterhead or otherwise contain the city's seal.
- The proclamation must be for the year for which you are applying for Tree City status.
- The proclamation should be signed by the mayor.

REMEMBER

All new, recertification and Growth Award applications must be completed on-line using the [Tree City USA Online Portal](#)². Paper applications will not be accepted. This site has good help options and support as you start your application. Any questions about the portal website or the application process itself must be directed to the Arbor Day Foundation staff. If you start an application and do not complete and submit it, it will not be reviewed and approved.

Tree City USA Growth Award & Application

The [Tree City USA Growth Award](#)⁶ recognizes Tree City communities that have made a significant improvement in their tree care efforts. *To be eligible, communities must have been a Tree City the previous year.* In order to qualify for the Growth Award, communities must have completed activities from any of the four categories which total 10 or more points. **Only those activities completed in the application year are eligible.**

Growth Awards are **not** intended to be achieved every year, but mark years when special projects or efforts have raised the level of tree care in the community.

Please note that most activities are only eligible the **first** year they are implemented, **unless they are significantly improved.** For example, if your community started a continuing education program for staff (activity A8) in one year and used that activity to receive a Growth Award, you cannot use it again for a Growth Award in a subsequent year unless the program was **significantly** improved.

- When completing the Growth Award Application in the Tree City USA On-Line Portal, complete the fields correctly; for example, for literature distribution the title and the number of publications distributed are required. Missing information will delay approval of your application.
- When attaching your documentation, give it a name that connects it to the appropriate category. One or two examples are generally sufficient for each category.
- Answer all questions for the activity selected. Most activities will require a brief explanation to demonstrate that it was new or significantly improved. An example of a good explanation is shown below:

A7 Youth Education – The Tree Board significantly improved its community-wide tree education program for children by sponsoring a new Poetry, Essay, and Poster Contest for primary and elementary school children. For the first time children were asked to create a picture made entirely of wood products or write an essay or poem on the theme “Trees for Tomorrow”. Winners were recognized at the town’s Arbor Day ceremony and presented with certificates and trophies. Winning essays and posters were exhibited at the library. The exhibit stimulated so much interest that the librarians asked that it stay up another week. See article about the contest that appeared in the June newsletter, photocopy of article that appeared in the newspaper, and flyers about the contests that were distributed to all primary and elementary school students. The Tree Board also provided free seedlings that were donated to all schools requesting them. Seedlings were used for educational purposes. See copy of seedling order form.

- Do not include every activity that may be eligible. Only **new** or **significantly improved** activities will be considered.
- Do not count activities under more than one category. Chose the one category that best fits the activity.

Application Process

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Additional documentation is necessary to show that these activities did take place and to show how urban forestry expenditures are required.

For Tree Growth Award applications, the appropriate documentation for each activity is described on ADF's [Growth Award Eligibility and Application Procedures](#).⁷

Website Links Used in this Guide

If you are using a paper copy of this guide and are not able to click on the live links to take you to the webpages referenced in this document, the following list is provided. The footnote references are associated with each webpage link:

- 1 Division of Forest Environment Urban & Community Forestry:
www.dem.ri.gov/urbanforestry
2. Tree City USA Online Portal:
<https://applications.arborday.org/community/city>
- 3 Tree City USA:
www.arborday.org/programs/treecityusa
- 4 Basic Sample Ordinance:
www.arborday.org/programs/treecityusa/documents/sample-tree-ordinance.pdf
- 5 The Independent Sector:
www.independentsector.org/volunteer_time
- 6 Tree City USA Growth Award:
<http://arborday.org/programs/treeCityUSA/growthAwards.cfm>
- 7 Growth Award Eligibility and Application Procedures:
<http://arborday.org/programs/treeCityUSA/eligibility.cfm>

