



**Western Forestry Leadership Coalition Issue Brief
Urban and Community Forestry Funding Alternatives
Prepared by the Western Urban & Community Forestry Committee
April 17, 2007**

Summary: This briefing paper provides an overview of funding issues and concerns for Urban and Community Forestry (U&CF) programs in the West and potential alternative funding sources. With declining federal funds, many State Foresters and U&CF program managers are seeking alternative sources of funding. Even at the current levels of federal funding, alternative sources are needed to meet the increasing demand for U&CF assistance. A brief survey of U&CF program managers was conducted to identify potential funding sources and partnerships for state programs.

Background: Prior to the 1990 Farm Bill only a handful of states had full-time Urban and Community Forestry programs. The 1990 Farm Bill greatly elevated federal funds that led to Urban and Community Forestry staffing and programs in all 17 Western states and the Pacific Island Territories. These programs have resulted in a significant increase in Tree City USA communities, grants to communities, leveraged local funds, and partnerships resulting in more Certified Arborists, better educated citizens, and greater awareness among civic leaders of the benefits of urban forests. The state/federal U&CF partnership has brought quantitative and qualitative benefits in tree protection ordinances, local U&CF staffing levels, and municipal tree care. While federal funds for the program are on the decline, national organizations, such as the National League of Cities and U.S. Conference of Mayors, are elevating the importance of urban forest management to the sustainable future of communities.

Issue: Western States and the Pacific Island Territories depend heavily on federal funds to provide technical assistance and sub-grants to local communities and partner organizations. While demand for Urban and Community Forestry activities in the West is increasing, federal funding to states/territories has been steadily declining over the past four years. Some states are at less than half of the federal funding level they received just a few years ago. In many states, this has resulted in the elimination of sub-grants to communities and in some cases elimination of positions and services.

Twelve western states responded to a short survey regarding funding needs and alternatives. Although every state and territory is different and responses varied, the survey provides some preliminary information. Results showed that sub-grants to stimulate action and continued technical assistance with proper arboricultural practices ranked as the highest need for communities served by state U&CF programs. Some respondents indicated a need for fewer start-up grants and less grants management, while providing larger dollar value demonstration grants.

Additional staff and more involvement with civic groups and non-profits ranked highest in assisting states meet the needs of communities. State U&CF program managers commented about the importance of integrating U&CF with various community systems such as transportation; energy; water quality; and natural systems, and managing community forests on a landscape level.

While several U&CF program managers report some state general funds for the U&CF program, over half indicated there was no state general funding for the program. A couple of states indicated they have formally pursued state general funds or are in the process of doing so. Most responding states indicated some type of corporate funding. However, corporate funds are often for specific projects and don't include funding for staff or administration. Most identified corporate funding has been from utility companies or the mineral industry. Several comments referenced the need to pursue funding from corporations that have a common cause and vested interest in urban forests.

Next Steps:

Given the great diversity within the U&CF program in western states and the Pacific Island Territories, there may not be a single west-wide funding approach. However, it would be beneficial if western states and territories shared successful alternative funding sources and approaches to developing funding and partnerships. Those willing to share information could best do so by submitting information to WFLC staff to post on the website as they identify and pursue funding opportunities and partnerships.

Help from USDA Forest Service partners and WFLC in identifying initiatives in other federal agencies would be useful and more efficient than states/territories trying to do this separately.

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Appendix: Average Rating of Survey Questions and Current and Potential Funding- Based on Responses from Twelve States

Question #1 Average rating: What are the most critical urban and community forestry needs of the communities you serve? (Please rank 1 to 5 in order of importance with 1 being the most important).

Financial assistance through sub grants/other sources
2.1

Technical assistance on proper arboricultural practices
2.3

Identifying and quantifying the benefits of the urban forest
3.5

Assistance with urban forest health monitoring and treatments
4.1

Engaging citizens/local leaders in urban and community forestry programs
3.1

Others listed:

Assistance on how to maximize the benefits of trees for their functional value and how to assess over time

Question #2 Average rating: Of the following what would be the most helpful in meeting the needs identified in the first question above? (Please rank 1 to 5 in order of importance with 1 being the most important).

Additional staff
2.2

Partner with more natural resource agencies
3.4

More involvement with civic groups/non profit organizations
2.8

Integrating the U&CF program with other forestry programs
3.1

Develop partnerships with agencies not directly related to natural resources
3.5

Others listed:

Education/knowledge on a multidisciplinary approach to community planning and development

Current or past alternative sources of funding/partnerships identified:

- Transportation Enhancement Funds through state DOT (At least three western states receive considerable ongoing funding)
- DOT funding for Urban Windbreak plantings
- Utility Companies (Mostly for small Arbor Day Grants)
- Mineral Industry (ExxonMobil, BP)
- State Income Tax check off
- Special license plate initiative
- Community Forestry Endowment/Trust
- Funding through a Book Sales program
- Firewise Communities USA (One western state shares U&CF staff time with this program)
- Small Business Administration (National funding in the mid 1990's)
- State grant program supported solely by private donations (30K-50k annually)
- Statewide Non profit
- Soil and Water Conservation Districts partnership in WUI/Forest/Watershed Health

Potential future programs/funding (local, state or federal) identified:

- Initiatives addressing global climate change concerns
- National funding for invasive species management
- Regional/National Waste Management Companies
- Permanent State Funding
- Statewide Business/Economic Development Councils
- Federal Departments of Transportation, Energy, Environmental Quality
- Statewide Nursery and Landscape Industry Associations