



Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management

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DEM ANNOUNCES COMPREHENSIVE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE GRANT PROGRAM FOR RHODE ISLAND URBAN AND COMMUNITY FORESTS

PROVIDENCE, RI – To provide better access to the benefits trees provide, the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (DEM) is partnering with the [Green Infrastructure Center \(GIC\)](#) to offer a new program to support urban forest planning and planting in Rhode Island cities and towns. The [Urban Forests for Rhode Island Technical Assistance Program](#) will support tree canopy mapping, planning, management, planting, code and ordinance development, master plans, policy development, and community engagement and education. This comprehensive program is funded by the [Inflation Reduction Act \(IRA\)](#) through the [USDA Forest Service](#) and Congressionally Directed Spending from 2023. DEM's [Division of Agriculture and Forest Environment \(DAFE\)](#) received \$1.2 million from IRA secured by U.S. Senators Jack Reed and Sheldon Whitehouse, and an additional \$300,000 from Congressionally Directed Spending to support a total of eight municipalities over the next five years.



In August, U.S. Senators Jack Reed and Sheldon Whitehouse, East Providence Mayor Roberto DaSilva, and students from the Emma G. Whiteknact Elementary School met at East Providence's Hull Street Park to celebrate \$300,000 in federal funding to expand DEM's urban tree cover initiatives in communities across Rhode Island.

Rhode Island's urban and community forests play a critical role in enhancing public health and resilience for both people and wildlife. Urban trees reduce summer heat, absorb air pollutants to reduce respiratory illness, while also mitigating flooding, improving drinking water and providing essential wildlife habitat and food. Not all Rhode Islanders have equal access to trees and the benefits trees provide – underserved neighborhoods and [environmental justice communities](#) often have significantly less tree canopy than wealthier, less diverse neighborhoods. This program will help address these disparities through a competitive grant process that prioritizes applicants with the most potential for improving tree equity.

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“As climate change impacts every state, including Rhode Island, it’s increasingly important to find innovative, environmentally-friendly ways to help keep neighborhoods healthier and cooler,” said Senator Reed, a senior member of the Appropriations Committee. “This federal funding will help a number of local municipalities plant more trees to improve air quality, create more green space, prevent erosion, and enhance public health.”

“Rhode Island has long recognized the potential of climate-smart infrastructure in urban communities, and DEM’s and GIC’s new urban canopy program will help turn this potential into progress. I’m pleased to have helped secure federal funding to boost the state’s urban tree cover and make our cities healthier and more sustainable,” said Senator Whitehouse.

“Trees are critical urban infrastructure that are essential to public health and well-being. Thanks to the Senators’ work in obtaining key Inflation Reduction Act funding, our Administration will be able to prioritize human-centered investment our communities,” said Governor Dan McKee.

“Rhode Island is a leader in urban forestry, aiming to unlock the full potential for urban tree canopies to slow climate change, reduce heat islands, manage stormwater runoff, and improve public health,” said DEM Director Terry Gray. “The Urban Forests for Rhode Island Technical Assistance Program and our continued partnership with GIC will advance the goals of tree equity and environmental justice by empowering communities to manage and plan their urban forests for the greatest benefits for their residents.”

“Tree equity means that everyone can have equal access to tree benefits such as cleaner air and water, natural beauty and safer communities, regardless of the race, income, age or social makeup of the community,” said GIC Executive Director Karen Firehock.

The Urban Forests for Rhode Island Technical Assistance Program will help expand and deepen DAFE’s [Urban and Community Forestry Grant Program](#), which works to support communities in developing sustainable urban forestry programs that enhance the environmental, economic, social, and health benefits that healthy trees and forests provide. Rhode Island’s communities can lose tree cover to storms, old age, development pressure, invasive pests and other impacts. Without actively replanting new trees, RI’s urban communities will become hotter in the summer and less livable. GIC has successfully worked with urban communities throughout the state, providing technical assistance to Bristol, East Providence and Barrington. The City of East Providence, which received a \$750,000 IRA award, will be using the data to help implement the program.

“The GIC has created an impressive set of tree canopy analysis maps for the City of East Providence,” said Johanna Walczak, Planner for the City of East Providence. “These maps, as well as policy review and recommendations, provide valuable data to the City that will help us to strategically plan where and how to grow our tree canopy cover and better manage our urban forest. As we implement our USDA Forest Service Urban and Community Forest IRA Grant over the next five years, the tree canopy analysis maps will help us identify priority locations for planting 1,500 new trees throughout the city, with emphasis on disadvantaged neighborhoods with low Tree Equity Scores.”

Localities awarded support through IRA will receive comprehensive technical assistance while those projects supported by Congressionally Directed Spending will be slightly smaller in scope. To be eligible for the IRA-funded program, applicants must represent the following:

1. A municipality or federally-recognized tribe within a [US Census urban area](#) in Rhode Island; and
2. The locality must also contain community census tracts that are classified by the federal government as "disadvantaged." Explore eligible disadvantaged communities with the [Climate and Environmental Justice Screening Tool](#); and
3. If selected for support, the municipality or federally recognized tribe will be required to submit a letter, signed by an authorized official, committing the locality to actively participate in the project. All applicants meeting criteria one and two are eligible to receive support through Congressionally Directed Spending.

All eligible applicants are encouraged to apply no later than **Jan. 18, 2024 by 5 PM EST**. An authorized municipal staff member or member of tribal government must complete the [online application](#). Awards will be announced on **Feb. 1, 2024**.

DEM and GIC are hosting an informational webinar on Wednesday, Dec. 6 from 1-2 PM. To register for the webinar, please [click this link](#). The session will be recorded and available for viewing.

Additional information can be found on [DEM's Urban and Community Forestry webpage](#). For more information, please contact Molly Henry at (401)-312-7857 or email her at mhenry@gicinc.org.

Founded in 2006, GIC is a nonprofit organization that assists communities in developing strategies for protecting and conserving their natural and cultural assets including tree cover, waterways, wetlands and bays, agricultural soils and parks and other open spaces to ensure community health and resilience through research, land-use planning, mapping and ecological restoration. For more information, visit www.gicinc.org.

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