



MARYLAND FOREST SERVICE

COMMUNITY FORESTRY CATALYST FUND

SUMMARY

This Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) is made possible by the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022, Public Law No: 117-169. Subtitle D, Sec. 23003 (a). State and Private Forestry Conservation Programs, (2) Urban and Community Forestry (2022-2031). The purpose of which is to provide multiyear, programmatic, competitive grants for tree planting and related activities, with a priority for projects that benefit underserved populations and areas through the Urban and Community Forestry Assistance program established under section 9(c) of the Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act Of 1978 (16U.S.C.2105(c)).

The Maryland Forest Service will accept applications to the Community Forestry Catalyst Fund ("Catalyst Fund") on a semi-annual basis. All application materials must be received by 11:59 pm Eastern Time on **March 15, 2024** to be considered for the performance period beginning July 1, 2024 or **September 15, 2024** to be considered for the performance period beginning January 1, 2025 (See "Application, Submission, and Reporting Requirements" for additional deadlines and relevant dates).

For inquiries specific to the content of the Catalyst Fund's requirements, contact the following shared inbox: forestry_grants.dnr@maryland.gov. Please limit questions to those regarding specific information contained in this NOFO (such as dates, page numbers, clarification of discrepancies, etc.). Questions related to eligibility, or the merits of a specific proposal will not be addressed.

Information on available pre-award webinars and other supporting information for this funding opportunity will be posted [here](#).

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PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The Catalyst Fund has been made possible through a financial allocation from the USDA Forest Service's Urban and Community Forestry Program as part of a \$1.5 Billion federal investment provided for in the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) of 2022. Urban and Community Forestry is a covered program under the [Justice40 Initiative](#) established through Executive Order 13985. To advance the mission of Justice40, all proposals awarded under this grant program must deliver 100% of the benefits of IRA investments through established partnerships with local organizations working to support disadvantaged communities experiencing low tree canopy and environmental justice.

Additionally, the Maryland Forest Service will administer this competitive subgrant program in accordance with the goals and objectives delineated in the [2020-2025 Maryland Forest Action Plan](#). First conceived in 2007 as part of the national strategy to "redesign" how federal and state cooperative assistance programs address America's forest lands, the Action Plan was worked on collaboratively by the Maryland Forest Service, the USDA Forest Service, and other key partners to ensure that federal and state resources are being focused on high priority areas with the greatest opportunity to achieve meaningful outcomes.

ESTIMATED FUNDING

The Maryland Forest Service may provide up to \$4.8 Million for Urban and Community Forestry investments through this opportunity (based on availability of funding, the quality of applications received, agency priorities, and other applicable considerations).

PERFORMANCE PERIOD

Applications will be considered under one of the following three funding tracks: **(A) Site Readiness; (B) Implementation, or (C) Capacity-Building.**

- Applications may be submitted under Tracks A + B together, but applications under Track C may not be combined with another Track.
- Applicants are welcome to apply to the Catalyst Fund more than once, but they may not be awarded grants in successive grantmaking cycles.

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| <p>TRACK A</p> <hr/> <p>SITE READINESS</p> <p>18 month award period</p> <p>minimum: \$5,000 maximum: \$50,000</p> <p>Example activities: Stump removal, hazardous tree removal, vegetation removal, concrete removal leading to replacement tree planting.</p> | <p>TRACK B</p> <hr/> <p>TREE PLANTING IMPLEMENTATION</p> <p>18 month award period</p> <p>minimum: \$5,000 maximum: \$50,000</p> <p>Pre-application technical assistance from MFS or an authorized representative from one of the 5MT partnership agencies is required</p> | <p>ADD-ON</p> <hr/> <p>SITE MAINTENANCE</p> <p>Awarded proposals in Track B will become eligible for two years of maintenance provided for by a MFS contractor.</p> <p>If the applicant elects to accept the free service, the terms and conditions of the maintenance plan will be appended to the award agreement at the time of execution.</p> |
| <p>TRACK C</p> <hr/> <p>CAPACITY BUILDING</p> <p>24 month award period; may be renewed for up to four (4) 6-month extensions</p> <p>minimum: \$50,000 maximum: \$250,000 per year</p> <p>Example activities: Hire staff or contractual support, develop strategic plan, expand or create new pilot programming</p> | | |

Track A: Funding agreements made in Track A will be for a period of eighteen (18) months. All activities funded under this track must result in new tree plantings. If an applicant is not proposing to combine Track A + Track B to accomplish this, then a planting plan and secured funding source will be required before the grant can be awarded.

Track B: Funding agreements made in Track B will be for a period of eighteen (18) months. Pre-application technical assistance from the Maryland Forest Service or an authorized representative from one of the [5 Million Trees for Maryland](#) partnership agencies is required. [Click here](#) for agency contact information. If you have any questions or would like a consultation with a Maryland Forest Service staff person, please email us at forestry_grants.dnr@maryland.gov.

If an awardee faces significant difficulties providing adequate maintenance on trees planted with support from this grant program, they can request a consultation to determine their eligibility for two years of maintenance provided free-of-charge by the Maryland Forest Service.

- **If the applicant elects to accept this service**, the terms and conditions of the maintenance plan will be appended to the award agreement at the time of execution.
- **If the applicant elects not to receive this service**, then a maintenance plan and secured funding source for two years of maintenance will be required before the grant can be awarded.

Track C: Funding agreements in Track C will be granted for a period of twenty-four (24) months. Funding agreements may be renewed for up to four (4) 6-month extensions at the discretion of the Maryland Forest Service and based upon the availability of funding.

Funding agreements will not be extended beyond July 15, 2028.

AMOUNT OF AWARDS

The Maryland Forest Service welcomes proposals spanning a broad range of costs from eligible entities working at a community, municipal, regional, and watershed scales. The minimum and maximum funding amount for projects are listed below, by track:

- **Track A:** minimum: \$5,000 / maximum: \$50,000
- **Track B:** minimum: \$5,000 / maximum: \$50,000
- **Track C:** minimum: \$5,000 / maximum: \$250,000 per year

ELIGIBILITY

Who can apply?

Entities eligible to apply to the Catalyst Fund include:

- Local government entity
- Federally Recognized Tribes and Tribal organizations as defined in 25 USC 5304 (l) and operating within the United States, or its territories
- Non-profit organizations
- Public and State-controlled institutions of higher education
- Community Based Organization, defined as a public organization that supports and/or represents a community and/or certain populations within a community through engagement, education, and other related services provided to individual community residents and community stakeholders.

Where can funds be used?

Eligible applicants may apply for funding for a project to be conducted on non-State or Federal lands such as:

- Local government
- Homeowner associations
- Private lands
 - For projects on private property, applications should include measures in place to maximize likelihood of establishment and long-term survival.
- Tribal/native corporation (includes Trust lands).

Furthermore, projects must take place in, or benefit, applicable disadvantaged communities, as identified by the [Inflation Reduction Act Disadvantaged Communities Map](#). The criteria and associated datasets used in the map include any census block that is included as disadvantaged in the Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool ([CEJST](#)).

What can funds be used for?

The USDA Forest Service's Urban and Community Forestry Program authorizes funding for a broad range of activities, such as urban wood utilization, urban food forests, extreme heat mitigation, and workforce development.

1. Examples of eligible activities include projects that:
 - a. Foster individuals, groups, and organizations in the communities served to become engaged participants in urban forest planning, planting, and management, especially those in disadvantaged communities that do not have adequate resources to install or maintain green infrastructure or are underrepresented.
 - b. Protect, enhance, and expand equitable urban tree canopy cover to maximize community access to human health, social, ecological, and economic benefits particularly in disadvantaged and nature-deprived communities experiencing low tree canopy cover, extreme heat and frequent flooding. Improve and increase access to parks and nature in communities.
 - c. Encourage long-term urban forest planning, assessment, and management.
 - d. Encourage proactive and systematic maintenance and monitoring of urban trees and forested natural areas to improve forest health; assess risk to forests from pests, disease, and adverse climate impacts; and formulate adaptive management strategies to improve forest resilience.
 - e. Advance the use of tree and forest inventories, monitoring, and assessment tools in priority areas, including monitoring and measurement of extreme heat.
 - f. Improve preparation for severe storms and the recovery of damaged or deteriorated landscapes to more healthy and resilient conditions.

- g. Protect, enhance and increase access to watersheds in urban and developing areas with a focus on conserving and managing forest patches, and green stormwater infrastructure.
 - h. Provide paid training experiences for urban forestry crews to establish and maintain urban forests into the future. Support youth employment opportunities, including workforce development and training for the creation and maintenance of green jobs and economic opportunities for planning, planting, and sustainably maintaining trees and forests, including training and retaining urban arborists, and producing and using urban forest products.
 - i. Develop paid on-the-job training opportunities, including pre-apprenticeships and apprenticeships, to expand workforce development pathways for green careers in urban and community forestry.
 - j. Address exotic invasive pest species that adversely impact urban forests.
 - k. Work across jurisdictional boundaries, leveraging ideas and resources to increase capacity to provide equitable access to benefits across the larger landscape and at a greater geographic scale.
 - l. Aid in planning, goal setting, and skill sharing with other professions such as urban planners, engineers, educators, recreational and public health officials.
2. Examples of project activities that are NOT eligible for funding under Urban and Community Forestry Authorities include:
- a. Research: Basic research as defined in 2 CFR 422.1, "Systematic study directed toward fuller knowledge or understanding of the fundamental aspects of phenomena and of observable facts without specific applications towards processes or products in mind." Note: Technical transfer, education, and outreach activities associated with applying research can be included in the application.).
 - b. Construction and capital improvements. Examples of construction include facilities, infrastructure, roads, new buildings, culverts, and boardwalks.
 - c. Land acquisition (conservation easement and fee simple) projects.
 - d. Cost-share, reimbursement, and other types of payment provided directly to private landowners. However, Urban and Community Forestry funding may be used to perform work on private lands; for example, an eligible entity could pay for trees to be planted on private lands with permission of the landowner.
 - e. Small business start-up funding.
 - f. Equipment purchases. Equipment rental should be considered as an alternative. Equipment is defined as an article of nonexpendable,

tangible personal property having a useful life of more than one year and an acquisition cost of \$5,000 or more per unit.

MATCH REQUIREMENT

100 percent of work must take place in, or benefit, disadvantaged communities and, therefore, match is waived. This match waiver must be passed on to any sub-awardees.

APPLICATION, SUBMISSION, AND REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

Application materials can be found on the Maryland Forest Service website [here](#). All application materials must be submitted to the Grants Gateway Portal by 11:59 pm Eastern Time on March 15 or September 15 of the given grant cycle. See table below for all deadlines and relevant dates.

Track A & B | 18-month award period

| Cohort | Application Open | Application Due | Award Announced | Performance Period Start | Progress Report Due | Performance Period End | Final Report Due |
|---------------|------------------|-----------------|-----------------|--------------------------|---------------------|------------------------|------------------|
| 2024 Cohort 1 | Jan 15, 2024 | March 15, 2024 | May 1, 2024 | July 1, 2024 | April 15, 2025 | Dec 31, 2025 | Jan 15, 2026 |
| 2024 Cohort 2 | July 1, 2024 | Sept 1, 2024 | Nov 1, 2024 | Jan 1, 2025 | Oct 15, 2025 | June 30, 2026 | Jan 15, 2027 |
| 2025 Cohort 3 | January 1, 2025 | March 1, 2025 | May 1, 2025 | July 1, 2025 | April 15, 2026 | Dec 31, 2026 | Jan 15, 2027 |
| 2025 Cohort 4 | July 1, 2025 | Sept 1, 2025 | Nov 1, 2025 | Jan 1, 2026 | Oct 15, 2026 | June 30, 2027 | Jan 15, 2028 |
| 2026 Cohort 5 | Jan 1, 2026 | March 1, 2026 | May 1, 2026 | July 1, 2026 | April 15, 2027 | Dec 31, 2027 | Jan 15, 2028 |

TRACK C | 24-month performance period

| Cohort | Application Open | Application Due | Award Announced | Performance Period Start | Progress Report Due | Performance Period End | Final Report Due |
|---------------|------------------|-----------------|-----------------|--------------------------|---------------------|------------------------|------------------|
| 2024 Cohort 1 | Jan 15, 2024 | March 15, 2024 | May 1, 2024 | July 1, 2024 | July 15, 2025 | June 30, 2026 | July 15, 2026 |
| 2024 Cohort 2 | July 1, 2024 | Sept 1, 2024 | Nov 1, 2024 | Jan 1, 2025 | Jan 15, 2026 | Dec 31, 2026 | Jan 15, 2027 |
| 2025 Cohort 3 | Jan 1, 2025 | March 1, 2025 | May 1, 2025 | July 1, 2025 | July 15, 2026 | June 30, 2027 | July 15, 2027 |
| 2025 Cohort 4 | July 1, 2025 | Sept 1, 2025 | Nov 1, 2025 | Jan 1, 2026 | Jan 15, 2027 | Dec 31, 2027 | Jan 15, 2028 |

*** 6-month, no-cost extensions will be allowable for Track C grantees up until July 15, 2028**

CONTENT AND FORM OF APPLICATION SUBMISSION

The Maryland Forest Service may choose not to consider applications that fail to comply with the required content, format, and page limits, or those that are incomplete.

To be considered for funding under this opportunity, an application must contain the following documents:

A. Project Narrative

1. **Project Title:** Provide a uniquely descriptive title for this project. Use this full title consistently on all submission communications and supplemental documents, including letters of support.
2. **Project Applicant:** Provide the name of the organization applying for funding.
3. **Contact Information:** Provide the name, title, address, phone number, and email address for the person leading the project or program.
4. **Project Summary:** In less than 100 words, provide a summary of the project that includes the scope, location, key partners, and expected accomplishments.
5. **Project Scope Alignment:** Describe the issues this project is seeking to address and how the project will contribute to the goals in this funding opportunity, including Justice40 and the Maryland Forest Action Plan
6. **Implementation Strategy/Timeline:** Provide a detailed explanation of the proposed approach and project schedule/timeline with milestones, expected accomplishments or measurable outcomes, and project assessment/evaluation methods.
7. **Capability and Capacity:** Describe how each contributing organization is suited for (mission) and qualified to deliver the project. Provide the names, titles, and organization affiliation and specific roles of key personnel for the project. Include qualifications and experience of key personnel to implement, monitor, and assess/report project outcome.
8. **Project Partners:** Provide the names of partner organizations, describe their involvement and contributions to the project, and qualifications of the organization and personnel as they relate to their roles in project implementation.

9. **Communications Plan:** Share your plans for communication on the project, including plans for 1) signage acknowledging the source of funding at project locations 2) inclusion of funding information in press and promotional materials.

10. **Evidence of Disadvantaged Community Status:** Clearly describe the scope of work to be performed in disadvantaged communities.

B. Budget

A budget should be submitted as an attachment.

Categories include the following:

- Personnel (salary costs)
- Fringe benefits
- Travel
- Supplies (tangible personal property other than equipment--includes tree purchase not completed under a contract for service)
- Contractual (e.g., contract for service, equipment rental)
- Other (sub-grants only)
- Indirect costs (NICRA, de minimis, or none—see below)

De minimis rate: Any Non-Federal entity (except State and local governments that receive more than \$35 million per year in Federal funding) that does not have a current negotiated (including provisional) indirect rate (NICRA) may elect to charge a de minimis rate of 10 percent of modified total direct costs (MTDC) which may be used indefinitely. No documentation is required to justify the 10 percent de minimis indirect cost rate. As described in 2 CFR 200.403, costs must be consistently charged as either indirect or direct costs but may not be double charged or inconsistently charged as both. If chosen, this methodology once elected must be used consistently for all Federal awards until such time as a non-Federal entity chooses to negotiate for a rate, which the non-Federal entity may apply to do at any time.

Modified Total Direct Cost (MTDC) means all direct salaries and wages, applicable fringe benefits, materials and supplies, services, travel, and up to the first \$25,000 of each subaward (regardless of the period of performance of the subawards under the award). MTDC excludes equipment, capital expenditures, charges for patient care, rental costs, tuition remission, scholarships and fellowships, participant support costs and the portion of each subaward in excess of \$25,000. Other items may only be excluded when necessary to avoid

a serious inequity in the distribution of indirect costs, and with the approval of the cognizant agency for indirect costs.

Negotiated Indirect Cost Rate Agreement (NICRA) may be used, if established.

C. Budget Narrative

In a separate document titled "Budget Narrative," explain and justify all requested budget items/costs. List in detail how the totals on the budget were determined and demonstrate a clear connection between costs and the proposed project activities.

The pages included as the budget narrative do not count toward the page limit. Cost sharing/matching must be committed at the time of application submission. The budget narrative must show the amounts and sources of match or cost share (including both cash and in-kind contributions).

PROPOSAL EVALUATION

Proposals will be evaluated based on the following Evaluation Criteria (100 points):

1. Alignment with Priorities (0-30 points)

Scope of work addresses [Justice40](#), as well as other priorities in [Maryland's Forest Action Plan](#)

- Increase equitable access to urban tree canopy and associated human health, environmental and economic (workforce) benefits in disadvantaged communities.
- Broaden community engagement in local urban forest planning.
- Improve resilience to climate change, pests, storm/extreme heat events through best management and maintenance practices.

2. Technical Merit (0-20 points)

- Strategy and methodology are logical and appropriate to attain stated results.
- Methodology demonstrates high likelihood of success and long-term outcomes.
- If applicable, methodology for identifying disadvantaged communities is appropriate to meet priorities.

3. Capability and Capacity (0-20 points)

- Organization(s) (including partners) have ability to carry out the proposed work within the grant period and meet federal grant requirements.

- Key personnel (including partners/contractors) have the training opportunities, skills, expertise, and relationships required to complete the work and achieve stated results; hired personnel include union labor, living wage paying jobs.

4. Measurable Results/Outcomes (0-20 points)

- Conditions are significantly improved for communities (people or places) as prioritized in Justice40 and Maryland's Forest Action Plan
- Increased equitable access to urban tree canopy and associated human health, environmental and economic (workforce) benefits in disadvantaged communities.
- Broadened community engagement in local urban forest planning.
- Improved resilience to climate change, pests, storm/extreme heat events through best management and maintenance practices.
- Recipients will be expected to implement and demonstrate measurable progress within 12 months of award.

5. Budget and Cost-Effectiveness (0-10 points)

- Budget and budget narrative adequately describes proposed costs.
- Administrative costs are reasonable compared to other expenditures.
- Costs are in proportion to project input needs and results/outcomes.

AWARD NOTIFICATIONS & REQUIREMENTS

All applicants will receive a letter stating the decision on the grant request. An application may be declined, partially awarded, or fully awarded. If awarded, MFS will send an award agreement with award conditions and due dates of progress and final reports. In most cases, grantees receive funds in phases, driven by project periods, and 10% of the total award is held until the final report is submitted and approved. In cases where the awardee fails to submit a progress report or final report by the due date, MFS reserves the right to terminate the award agreement and require a refund of funds already transferred to the awardee.

When the project is complete, awardees are required to complete final reports that may include but are not limited to submission of all receipts for supplies, invoices for subcontractors / contractors, and copies of timesheets for personnel time used (timesheets must include date, name, time worked per day, and coding to tie the time worked to the award). All financial back-up documentation will be grouped and numbered to correspond to budget line items. Organizations with outstanding final or progress reports will not be awarded additional grants.

REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

Semi-annual financial and progress reports are required for IRA grants. Reports are due 15 days from the period end. Timely submittal of financial and progress reports for each grant as indicated in your award agreement will be required. Payments will be withheld until missing reports are received and approved.

Progress reports should highlight direct quantitative and qualitative investment activities and outcomes and include stories and photographs that illustrate these.

The U.S. Forest Service and Inflation Reduction Act will be acknowledged as a funding source for work performed under this grant, including any future signage requirements.

CONTACT FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

For inquiries specific to the content of the NOFO requirements, contact the following shared inbox: forestry_grants.dnr@maryland.gov. Please limit questions to those regarding specific information contained in this NOFO (such as dates, page numbers, clarification of discrepancies, etc.). Questions related to eligibility, or the merits of a specific proposal will not be addressed.