

Grant Guidelines for All Awardees

NYS Department of Environmental Conservation

Urban and Community Forestry Grant Program (Round 16)

Introduction

Welcome! The purpose of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) Urban and Community Forestry (UCF) Program, a unit within the Division of Lands and Forests, is to help communities develop healthy community forests and sustainable UCF programs. The UCF Grant Program assists communities in planning and management of their urban and community forests.

This document covers general guidelines for all awardees. This and additional project-specific guideline documents are provided to help awardees move through the grant contracting process smoothly and execute projects successfully. Please review and refer to this and appropriate project-specific guidelines.

As a reminder, as of January 16, 2024, New York has transition grantmaking activities from the Grants Gateway to the Statewide Financial System (SFS)

Online Resources

Grant-related resources such as information on guidance, payment instruction and forms, and insurance can be found at <https://dec.ny.gov/get-involved/grant-applications/lands-forests-grantee-resources>

After Award

- **E-Pay.** All awardees should be signed up for New York State E-Pay, the State's electronic payment system. To enroll, go to the Comptroller's website at <https://www.osc.ny.gov/state-vendors>. This will ensure quick payment as they rarely send paper checks anymore.
- **Press Release** – In order to promote Urban Forestry in New York State, we request that every awardee send out a press release and use social media to announce the award in the local and regional community. Keep a copy of the press release and any resultant press, radio, tv links, photos and screen shots of social media and upload everything in the first Progress Report in the Statewide Financial System (SFS). We love to see press or hear about publicity so feel free to email us with your success! This will count as one of the outreach and education activities.

- **DEC Contract Step 1 - Insurance** – all awardees will be asked for current Workers Compensation and Disability (or exemption from) insurance coverage; those awarded for Tree Removal or Tree Planting will also be asked for Liability plus three endorsements. You will need to send DEC directions to your insurance carrier for successful and timely submission. After we receive these, we can proceed with contract details. Please complete within 30 days of award and email to vicky.wagenbaugh@dec.ny.gov.
- **Step 2 – Contract Preparation** – Once the insurance is filed and approved, we will have a call regarding your pending contract with DEC, the role of the Awardee and to confirm the Performance Measures (PM) you outlined in your application. Almost every contract will need some addition or clarification and the Awardee will need to make the changes, with our assistance, in the Statewide Financial System. DEC will follow the call with an email to verify details.
- **Step 3 – Statewide Financial System Preparation** - Your original **application** will always be available to you in SFS, as will the completed contract and a copy of the **Round 16 RFA**. The **contract** will include the Work Plan, Budget Summary, Objectives and PMs. The PMs entered as part of the application will become the basis for quarterly progress reporting and must be met during the contract period. The Awardee is responsible for this contract. If you have a grant writer entering the Progress Reports in SFS, they must be given the title of Grantee, which means they can write the report but not submit the report. Any correspondence with DEC by a grant writer must be copied to the Awardee. This is because they are not responsible for the contract. The person given the SFS role of Contract Signatory or Delegated System Administrator needs to submit the Progress Report after approving internally. Now is a good time for the SFS Delegated Administrator (must be municipal or non-for-profit employee) to go to SFS and check that all roles are current and old roles have been deleted. Passwords expire every 3 months so be ready to change them as you will only log in once a quarter. The Troubleshooting Tips for SFS Users is very helpful: [SFS Troubleshooting Tips.pdf \(ny.gov\)](#). SFS Help Desk is also very good - 518-457-7717 or 855-233-8363 (toll-free) or HelpDesk@sfs.ny.gov.
- **Step 4 – Contract** – Once everyone has agreed on the Performance Measures (Scope of Work), the contract is sent to DEC Contracts. If over \$50,000, it will then be sent to the Attorney General's office and to the Office of the State Comptroller. Contract preparation must be completed within 90 days of award so if we make a request, please do not delay in replying. For Round 16 we will adhere to DEC Oversight and withdraw funding "if the grantee fails to make significant and timely progress on the project" (see page 7 of the RFA for full details). From the date of sendoff to Contracts to approval by NYS it is generally 30-45 days, so the insurance and contract building need to be completed within 30-45 days.
- **Step 5 – Waiting for the Contract** – Work can begin on the grant as of the Contract Start Date which is listed in the Statewide Financial System on the Contracts page, along with the status of your contract. No work can begin prior to the Contract Start Date, however work can begin on hiring consultants and outside

companies or finalizing in-house projects as long as grant or match funding is not involved. DEC abides by local procurement guidelines but going to bid is encouraged to ensure cost effectiveness. The grants administrator will provide a list of Consultants; these are not recommendations but people and companies we are aware of that have either provided bids or worked on urban forestry projects over the years. For the betterment of the New York State economy, please hire New York State contractors and firms, and purchase your grant supplies within New York State from New York State firms and individuals, as a top priority.

- **Bidding** – As bidding ends in a signed contract and is competitive, it is a good way to work through all aspects of the project and bring together funded items. **Please use the bidding tables provided in the project-specific guidelines document** for all quoting so we can all see an ‘apples to apples’ comparison between bidders. Include billable project portions such as “Trees to be Removed” and also anything else the consultant may need to charge such as “Meetings.” Check the items in your application budget and Work Plan to recall what was itemized. Where possible, use New York State local and regional consultants – this is generally more cost effective; the people who know your area, community and history are more likely to hire local crews, understand local conditions and be more available. For Tree Removal projects, bid by tree DBH (diameter at breast height) e.g. 6”-10”, 11-14” and so on. For Tree Planting the table may be simple if all the trees will be the same caliper, but most quotes will be a variation of bare root and balled and burlapped and you will also need a price for meetings or final presentation. Prices for independent arborist and landscape consultants would not be part of this table if awardee is doing the work themselves, and nor would supplies.

After the DEC Contract has been signed and the bid/project has been awarded to a consultant/contractor

- **Kickoff meetings** – internal and external. For best results, the Awardee should be very organized and hold the reins prior to meeting with the contractor or consultant. All internal work such as mapping, tree board, Conservation Advisory Council or volunteer committee responsibilities should be discussed. Bring in local partners now and let them know what will be needed - historical society, library, Rotary, Chamber of Commerce, friends groups, Conservancy etc. **Photos and documentation of the project are essential**, and responsibilities for the project and long-term support should be clearly defined in the scope of work.

Next, most projects should have an external kickoff meeting where the consultant or contractor (tree removal company, nursery or tree installer), the awardees including the person responsible for payment of invoices, DEC urban forester, volunteer groups and any other partners or members of interested parties such as the Economic Development team, will meet to launch the project and divide up responsibilities. If unable to be held in person, meetings by phone, Webex, Skype, Zoom or similar are fine. Please include the regional DEC forester (see list at the bottom of this document) in either or both internal and external meetings and give

them ample time to schedule; they will attend if available. DEC foresters have a good deal of urban forestry grant experience and can provide invaluable guidance which will help awardees meet their DEC grant requirements. Clarify any permits needed and municipal work order coordination contacts, consultant work hours and any DEC requirements for inspection. A second part of the kickoff meeting can take place in the field with awardee, consultant and DEC forester in the early days of the project if possible. Whether Tree Inventory, Maintenance, Planting or Education Programming, the kickoff meeting is an integral part of the grant process.

- **During the Project** – Awardees should remain ahead of the game, knowing the status of the project at all times and planning ahead to the next point. Visit the work site regularly and have a contact person for the consultant such as DPW or Highway Supervisor, Village Manager or Administrator. Have the contractor liaise with the Village Clerk or whomever will administer the billing; be vigilant about paying consultants on time but make sure you are happy with the work and have no questions. Where possible, the DEC forester should inspect, approve and sign off on the project before the consultant is paid.
As needed, go back to the RFA and to your contract and make sure everything is covered and that ineligible items are not appearing in the project. Don't leave Outreach, Partnership activities or Match until the end; if these activities are not complete when the final invoices are submitted, DEC withholds 15%. Consultants are not responsible for organizing outreach to media, or for writing media or public relations plans. The Urban and Community Forestry Grant Program does not approve mailbox drops or other advertising by consultants during the project process. Consultants are also not responsible for training staff (unless agreed to in the DEC contract AND the consultant contract) or going above the originally agreed DEC and consultant contract items. Awardees need to make sure all contract terms are delivered by the consultant prior to sending in payment requests to DEC.
- **Outreach & Education** – This is a good time to revisit the Outreach and Education and Partnership activities listed in the application and contract. Have new ideas emerged, can everything be achieved or do other activities need to be substituted? Have partners come forward asking for wood reutilization after tree removal? Can the library or a youth organization use the wood to make benches or park tables? Check with the grants administrator – all ideas are encouraged and acknowledged!
- **A final meeting or presentation** to either the City Council, Town or Village Board, Community Board or the public is recommended. The consultant should present on Inventories and Community Forest Management Plans and might present on planting and maintenance projects. This should be factored into the bid if the consultant will present or assist with explaining the project - how, why, when, results and recommendations. Taking photos or video for projects may assist consultants that do not do this as a rule. Final presentations can be incredibly successful and impart knowledge that is new to local officials, potential advocates and volunteers. Often the presentation can be filmed for public access tv or Facebook/YouTube and can be uploaded in Grants Gateway. Please give the DEC forester advance notice of the date of the presentation so they may attend if they are able.

- **Project Changes** - At any stage of the project, if scope of work changes are needed, please discuss with the contractor and email the grants administrator for approval. Changes in scope of work or promised outreach, partnership or long-term goals should be discussed before change takes place so a note can be added to the existing Work Plan or a contract modification made. Failure to do so could result in nonpayment of funds. For instance, in a tree inventory, if all trees in the original mapped area have been tabulated and there are funds left over, send an email with updated map before moving to another geographical area. For tree maintenance, send an email with a list and photographs of secondary trees to be removed or pruned if the winning bid is lower than anticipated. We almost always say yes but there are exceptions.
- **DEC Inspections** - At the end of the project, and sometimes during the project, the regional DEC forester will inspect the work. Once notified of a request for inspection, the DEC forester will contact the awardee to schedule the inspection. Where possible, it is beneficial for a relevant staff or tree board member to accompany the DEC forester. This will speed up the inspection time as the local person will know the whereabouts of certain species or risk trees. Please keep a running worklist of Tree Maintenance and Tree Planting in case the DEC forester can make an interim inspection. It is highly beneficial to keep the regional DEC forester involved and informed throughout the project. This helps confirm everything is on track (planting/pruning is done correctly) so it doesn't have to be redone; in addition, they are a free fountain of tree knowledge. For Tree Maintenance and Tree Planting, please supply before and after photos. Most of the before photos you may already have from the original application so they can just be sent again.
- **Checklist** for completing the project
 1. DEC Inspection is approved
 2. Outreach and Education activities are completed
 3. Final Progress report is filed in the Statewide Financial System
 4. State Voucher, Expense Report, Invoices and cancelled checks are sent to grants administrator

Congratulations and all the best for a healthy urban forest!

List of regional urban foresters.

Region 1: Nassau, Suffolk

John Wernet, john.wernet@dec.ny.gov

Region 1: Nassau, Suffolk

Mike Fiorentino, mf628@cornell.edu

Region 2: NYC all boroughs

Tim Wenskus, timothy.wenskus@dec.ny.gov

Region 3: Westchester, Putnam, Rockland, Orange, Sullivan, Ulster, Dutchess

George Profous, george.profous@dec.ny.gov

Region 4: Albany, Schenectady, Schoharie, Montgomery, Rensselaer, Columbia

Tyler Levy, tyler.levy@dec.ny.gov

Region 4: Otsego, Delaware, Greene

Skyler Girard, skyler.girard@dec.ny.gov

Region 5: Fulton, Hamilton, Saratoga, Warren and Washington

Amy Mackenzie, amy.mackenzie@dec.ny.gov

Region 5: Clinton, Essex, Franklin

Bryan Ellis, bryan.ellis@dec.ny.gov

Region 6: Herkimer, Oneida

Dan Welc, dan.welc@dec.ny.gov

Region 6: Jefferson, Lewis

Mike Giocondo, michael.giocondo@dec.ny.gov

Region 6: St. Lawrence

Steve Sherwood, steven.sherwood@dec.ny.gov

Region 7: Cortland, Tioga, Onondaga

Matt Swayze, matthew.swayze@dec.ny.gov

Region 7: Cortland, Cayuga, Tompkins

Matt Swayze, matthew.swayze@dec.ny.gov

Region 7: Chenango, Madison

Brian Burlew, brian.burlew2@dec.ny.gov

Region 7: Broome

Nate Funk, nathan.funk@dec.ny.gov

Region 8: Genesee, Monroe, Orleans, Wayne

Gary Koplun, garrett.koplun@dec.ny.gov

Region 8: Ontario, Livingston, Seneca

Brice June, brice.june@dec.ny.gov

Region 8: Chemung, Schuyler, Yates

Pat Lafler, patrick.lafler@dec.ny.gov

Region 8: Steuben

Cody Lafler, cody.lafler@dec.ny.gov

Region 9: Erie, Niagara, Wyoming, Allegany, Cattaraugus, Chautauqua

Nate Morey, nate.morey@dec.ny.gov

Revised 6/12/2024
End.