

When starting a community forestry or beautification program it is important to have a steering committee that functions well and is in it for the long haul.

Here are some general guidelines to follow as you organize a successful tree committee:

- The committee should be representative of the entire community.
- A city staff representative or elected official can help your group work effectively with city government. However, the committee shouldn't be dominated by city personnel – limit representatives to one or two.
- There should be a sufficient number of members to avoid overburdening anyone.
- A group should be balanced in terms of gender, race, ethnicity, new residents vs. longtime residents, age, and socioeconomic status.

Committee Make-up

Consider the skills and talents individuals can contribute as you invite new members to join:

Volunteer Leaders: Individuals who have a special ability to work with volunteers and who may have a proven track record serving with other organizations or on other projects.

Service Club Leaders: Members of local service clubs are often eager to volunteer in the community.

Corporate Representatives: Be certain to include individuals from major employers in the area. Many local companies may match dollar-for-dollar funds raised for local projects.

Media: Local radio and newspaper owners/staff can be very helpful, particularly if they serve as committee members.



Tree Lovers: Every community has individuals who have a special love for trees.

Movers and Shakers: These are people who may or may not have experience with tree projects, but are willing to work hard to get the job done.

Local Utility Staff: Local utility representatives may be willing to serve on your tree steering committee, such as on a Site Selection subcommittee. They may even volunteer the use of some equipment for planting!

City and County Government Representatives: A liaison with city government willing to serve on the committee is very important. This could be the mayor, a council member, or a parks board commissioner. Some county conservation directors are also enthusiastic about getting involved in urban tree planting and beautification projects.

County Extension Offices: Many extension professionals have a real love of trees and extensive knowledge of them. If your agent is close by, he or she may be willing to become an active committee member. He or she may also supply you with the names of Master Gardeners or Master Woodland Managers who often need to volunteer community service time.

Other Tree and Environmental Organizations: Find other individuals and organizations that are interested in beautification and tree planting and want to get involved in cooperative projects.

Education: A representative from the local school system would enhance the development of the education component. High school or college student government leaders may also prove valuable members.

Youth and Youth Group Leaders: Youth can add energy and vision to your committee. And adult volunteers with knowledge of tree care and other committee functions can act as mentors to the youth. See our [Engaging Youth in Your Community Programs](#) resource guide for more information.

Nurseries: Many plant and tree nurseries are actively involved with community programs. Nurseries also provide excellent long-term technical support to local efforts.

Your Local Group

After you have formed a group that consists of persons representing a full spectrum of your community, give the committee a name. The name should be upbeat and capture attention. Many groups choose to use Trees Forever in the title, which we welcome. For communities in Iowa where grants are received from utility companies, if your community is served by more than one utility company, we suggest that you *not* use the utility company tree program name.

Elect Officers

The next step in steering committee development is to elect officers. To avoid too much responsibility being placed on one or two people, it is ideal to have at minimum three officers: chair (or co-chairs), secretary and treasurer. We recommend that city government personnel not serve as chair and that officers be committed to serving at least two years to ensure consistency and survival of the program. It is a good idea for an organization to consider rotating officers and roles to prevent burnout.

Roles of a Steering Committee Chairperson
Ensures that a written agenda is ready for the meeting; the secretary should mail the agenda with minutes one week before the committee meeting, if possible.
Starts the meeting on time.
Focuses the discussion on one agenda item at a time.
Cuts off discussion (or debate) when it becomes redundant or goes off topic.
Guides discussions to ensure that everyone has a chance to participate and that no one dominates the meeting.
Keeps the atmosphere relaxed and informal; use a consensus approach to reach a conclusion.
Delegates jobs to volunteers when needed.
Makes the agenda items everyone's business. If an item involves only you and one other person, it is not committee business.
Encourages full discussion and participation (that may mean heated debate). Hears the minority viewpoint. Serves as negotiator and arbitrator, and remains neutral.
Listens better than anyone else. (Have someone take notes for you; don't try to do it yourself.)
Keeps temper under wraps and adjourns on time!

Assigning Roles to Steering Committee Members

We recommend that each committee member, or in some cases a small group of committee members, focus on a particular area or role. Be sure to have a clear definition of what is involved in each role. Here is a list of our recommended areas of focus:

Volunteer Coordination

Assists in recruiting volunteers. Focus on involving a broad spectrum of the community including people of all ages. Provide a method for volunteer recognition at the end of each planting season.

Site Design/Species Selection

Assures that the right tree will be planted in the right place. This involves selecting the sites for planting trees, selecting the tree species suitable for the site, and preparing a site plan showing tree species and locations.

Tree Acquisition

Works with those involved in site and species selection. Gets bids from several nurseries and purchases trees. See our [Purchasing Trees](#) resource guide for more information.

Fundraising

Plans short- and long-term fundraising strategies. Keeps records of money donated and raised. This may be a good role for a city government liaison, especially if your group's funds are held in a city account.

Education

Gets schools involved in your tree-planting program. Provide the schools with educational material. Educates the public about the benefits of trees by sponsoring workshops, organizing tree fairs, etc.



Media

Keeps the media informed of program developments, committee activities, special events, and information regarding trees. It is especially important to consistently mention your major sponsors every time you contact your media about your activities. This will go far toward maintaining sponsorship in the future.

Planting Day

Organizes and coordinates planting day. See our [Successful Tree-Planting Projects and Events](#) resource guide for information on organizing a planting event.

Tree Care

Develops plans for the establishment of young trees and their long-term maintenance.

Record Keeping

Documents financial records, volunteer participants and hours, trees planted, meeting minutes, etc. for reporting purposes.

Join Trees Forever on its mission to plant and care for trees and the environment by empowering people, building community and promoting stewardship.

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