

# Rhode Island's Guide to **Tree City USA** Certification, Recertification, and Growth Award Applications



**URBAN & COMMUNITY**  
FORESTRY PROGRAM



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## Welcome to Tree City USA

Participating in the [Arbor Day Foundation’s \(ADF\) Tree City USA \(TCUSA\)](#) program represents a significant commitment to the management of your community’s urban forest resource.

This guide contains instructions for Tree City USA Certification, Recertification, and Growth Award application process. It details the requirements of each of the four standards. Please take the time to carefully read through the information.

Your application must be done online through the [Tree City USA Online Portal](#). Paper applications will not be accepted. There is an option on the application portal to contact the Arbor Day Foundation for additional assistance if you have issues with signing in, the application process, or the online portal. If you start an application and do not complete and submit it, it will not be reviewed.

If you have any questions regarding what information is needed for the documentation accompanying your application, please contact the [Rhode Island Urban and Community Forestry \(UCF\) Program](#).

# Tree City USA Standards

A community must meet four standards to obtain TCUSA status: a tree board or department, a public tree care ordinance, annual expenditure of \$2 per capita on community tree care activities, and an Arbor Day observance and proclamation. These standards “provide the structure your community needs to launch a successful urban forestry program” (*Tree City USA: Greening America, The National Arbor Day Foundation*).

**Please note** – while the program is called Tree City USA, communities of any size are encouraged to apply.

*The standards, as defined by the Arbor Day Foundation, are:*

## Standard 1: A Tree Board or Department

A Tree City USA community has a community tree board, department, or position with legal authority and responsibility for tree care decisions. In Rhode Island, this standard may be met by having a designated Tree Warden, Tree Board, Tree Commission, Conservation Commission, or other similar entity.

**Purpose:** Established authority over tree care decisions helps community officials and members of the public know who is responsible for managing public trees. Involving community officials and members of the public in tree care increases awareness of the benefits public trees bring to a community.

## Standard 2: A Public Tree Care Ordinance

A Tree City USA community has a tree care ordinance that: 1. assigns authority over and responsibility for the care of public trees through the establishment of a tree board, department, or both, 2. provides clear guidance for planting, maintaining, and/or removing trees from streets, parks, and other public spaces, and 3. is always in effect. This standard is intentionally broad to allow communities of all sizes to participate in the Tree City USA program.

**Purpose:** Tree ordinances and other legally enforceable policies guide communities on the proper care for public trees.

## Standard 3: Annual Expenditure of \$2 per capita on Community Tree Care Activities

A Tree City USA community must document a minimum of \$2 per capita annual expenditure on community tree care related activities.

These activities include, but are not limited to, dead and hazardous tree removal, pruning, planting, watering and fertilizing, and insect and disease control. Staff time, contracted work, and/or volunteer time count towards the expenditure total. See page 4 for a complete list of qualifying expenditures.

**Purpose:** A dedicated level of financial support at or above the \$2 per capita minimum in the community’s budget demonstrates the community’s commitment to the long-term health of public trees.

## Standard 4: An Arbor Day Observance and Proclamation

A Tree City USA community has a public Arbor Day Observance and has an official, annual community proclamation issued and signed by the mayor, city council, or equivalent official or representative. The types of celebrations can range from a simple tree planting event to an all-week observance.

Many communities celebrate their Arbor Day in conjunction with the National Arbor Day (the last Friday in April), as does the state of Rhode Island, but you can celebrate your Arbor Day any time of year. If you choose to plant trees at your celebration, a spring or fall Arbor Day observance is recommended.

**Purpose:** Arbor Day is an opportunity to earn publicity for your community and to educate citizens about proper tree care and the value of community trees.

## Tree City USA Qualifying Expenditures

The following list includes **qualifying (in green)** and **non-qualifying (in red)** expenditures for public tree care to reach the \$2 per capita requirement of Standard 3. Grant funds used to pay for any of these activities can be counted towards a qualifying expenditure.

### *Tree Planting & Initial Care*

- Tree care time: watering, removing stakes, insect control, mulching, etc. for new trees
- Trees
- Supplies: staking, mulch, watering bags, tools, gloves, etc.
- Equipment rental
- Donated trees and donated tree planting services

### *Tree Maintenance*

- Tree care time: watering, removing stakes, insect control, mulching, etc. for existing trees
- Pruning time
- Leaf & brush pick-up
- Biomass recycling
- Equipment maintenance
- Administrative time
- Computer inventory software
- Durable equipment: chainsaws, bucket trucks, etc.
- Equipment rental

### *Tree Removal*

- Tree removal time (staff or contracted)
- Durable equipment: chainsaws, bucket trucks, etc.
- Equipment rental

### *Management*

- Tree worker salaries & benefits (use a percentage if tree care is only part of their job)
- Tree care conferences and workshops attended by city workers
- Memberships in and donations to tree organizations
- Public education materials: brochures, newsletters, flyers, etc.
- Tree inventory work
- Consultants to write a plan or give advice
- Insurance
- Discounts by local vendors

### *Utility Line Clearance*

- Utility line clearance

### *Volunteer Time*

- Prizes for Arbor Day contests
- Volunteer time (at the national volunteer rate, calculated by the Independent Sector) for Tree Board meetings, tree planters, Arbor Day preparations, etc.
  - See the appendix for sample volunteer sign-in sheets

### *Non-qualifying Expenditures*

- Lawn mowing
- Tree work on non-public areas

# Tree City USA Application Guidelines

This section describes all the necessary components of the application.

## Details

Provide the correct name, title, and information for each section listed below. While some people fill multiple roles, please provide at least two different contact names (email and phone) besides the mayor or equivalent official role.

- **Mayor or Equivalent Official:** the official who will sign the proclamation and the application.
- **City Forestry Contact:** the person within the community that has direct knowledge of the community's urban forestry program, is often also the community representative or liaison with the Tree Board. This is the person the RI UCF program coordinator will contact with questions regarding the application or documentation.
- **PR/Communications Contact:** the person responsible for official communications for the community.
- **Community Information:** the name of your community.
- **Shipping address for recognition materials:** the address where all recognition materials will be shipped after the application is approved.

## Standard 1: Tree Board or Department Form

- Statement of who is **responsible** for the care of all public trees (drop down menu)
- **Tree Board Chairperson** contact information (when there is a tree board)
- Up to 5 additional **Board Members** contact information (when there is a tree board)
- **Department Chair or City Manager** contact information (when there is a department)
- Tree Board **meeting frequency** (when there is a tree board, drop down menu)

## Standard 2: Community Tree Ordinance

- The **date** (or best estimate) the current tree ordinance was established and whether the ordinance has been recently updated (drop down menu)
- A copy of the **ordinance** (or individual clauses) that meets the requirements (file attachment **and** copied text)

If you are a returning applicant, this section will auto-populate with the ordinance submitted in the previous application. Make sure to upload an updated version of the ordinance if any changes were made since the last application submission.

## Standard 3: Budget Expenditures

- The community **population count**
- The **dollar amount spent** (if any) in the following categories: \*
  - Tree planting and Initial Care
  - Tree Maintenance
  - Tree Removal
  - Management

- Utility Line Clearance (optional)
- Volunteer **hours** (the equivalent dollar amount will be automatically calculated)
- Other tree related costs
- Community **tree management statistics** in the following categories:
  - Number of trees planted
  - Number of trees pruned (optional)
  - Number of trees removed (optional)
- **Attachments:**
  - Annual work plan (optional)
  - Supporting budget documents (optional)

\*The community's expenditure per capita will be automatically calculated by the web application.

## Standard 4: Arbor Day Observance

- **Date** of the Arbor Day celebration
- **Documentation** of the Arbor Day celebration
  - Acceptable documentation includes photos from the event, social media posts, published newspaper articles, or another form of proof. The documentation should clearly depict tree related activities (i.e. tree plantings, holding Arbor Day or Tree City USA signs, etc.).
- The signed and dated **Arbor Day Proclamation**
  - The proclamation should be on community letterhead or otherwise contain the community's seal, must be for the year for which you are applying for Tree City status, and must be signed by the mayor or other equivalent official.

## Signature

The application must be **signed by the mayor or an equivalent official**. The online application will automatically generate a signature sheet for your community. Please save the signature sheet, have it signed by the mayor or equivalent official (digital signatures are accepted), and upload the signed copy to the application.

# Tree City USA Growth Award Application

The [Tree City USA Growth Award](#) recognizes Tree City USA communities that have made a significant improvement in their tree care efforts. Growth Awards are not intended to be achieved every year. They mark years when special projects have raised the level of tree care in the community.

Communities must have been a Tree City the previous year to be eligible for this award. In order to qualify for the Growth Award, communities must have completed activities within the application year which total 10 or more points (points allotted by the Arbor Day Foundation).

Please note that most activities are only eligible the first year they are implemented, unless they are significantly improved. For example, if your community started a continuing education program for staff in one year and used that activity to receive a Growth Award, you cannot use it again for a Growth Award in a subsequent year unless the program was significantly improved.

When attaching your documentation, give it a name that connects it to the appropriate category. One or two examples are generally sufficient for each category. Answer all questions for the activity selected. Most activities will require a brief explanation to demonstrate that it was new or significantly improved. Below is an example of a good explanation.

***Youth Education** – The Tree Board significantly improved its community-wide tree education program for children by sponsoring a new Poetry, Essay, and Poster Contest for primary and elementary school children. For the first time children were asked to create a picture made entirely of wood products or write an essay or poem on the theme “Trees for Tomorrow”. Winners were recognized at the town’s Arbor Day ceremony and presented with certificates and trophies. Winning essays and posters were exhibited at the library. The exhibit stimulated so much interest that the librarians asked that it stay up another week. See article about the contest that appeared in the June newsletter, photocopy of article that appeared in the newspaper, and flyers about the contests that were distributed to all primary and elementary school students. The Tree Board also provided seedlings that were donated to all schools requesting them. Seedlings were used for educational purposes. See copy of seedling order form.*

Do not include every activity that may be eligible. Only new or significantly improved activities will be considered.

Do not count activities under more than one category. Choose the one category that best fits the activity.

## Application Process

All Growth Award applications must be completed online using the [Tree City USA Online Portal](#). Paper applications will not be accepted. This site offers support options as you start your application. Any questions about the website or the application process itself must be directed to the Arbor Day Foundation staff. If you start an application and do not complete and submit it, it will not be reviewed. Additional documentation is necessary to show that these activities did take place are required. The appropriate documentation for each activity is described on ADF’s Growth Award Eligibility and Application Procedures Activity List on their website.

# Appendix

## Appendix 1: Websites with helpful information

- Rhode Island Urban and Community Forestry Program  
[www.dem.ri.gov/urbanforestry](http://www.dem.ri.gov/urbanforestry)
- Tree City USA Program  
[www.arboday.org/our-work/tree-city-usa/get-started](http://www.arboday.org/our-work/tree-city-usa/get-started)
- Tree City USA Online Portal  
<https://recognition.arboday.org/>
- The Independent Sector  
[www.independentsector.org/research/value-of-volunteer-time/](http://www.independentsector.org/research/value-of-volunteer-time/)
- Tree City USA Growth Award  
[www.arboday.org/our-work/tree-city-usa/growth-award](http://www.arboday.org/our-work/tree-city-usa/growth-award)

## Appendix 2: Example sign-in sheets

Please see the next pages for three examples of sign-in sheets that can be used to track volunteer hours. These forms are for group volunteer activities such as planting, maintenance, workshop support, staffing booths, etc.





