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CONCLUSION
In an effort to improve equitable, community-focused urban forestry outcomes, City Council passed ongoing funding for a Community Tree Program in 2022. Following the budget adoption, the City of Tacoma solicited proposals for a partnership program between the City’s Urban Forestry Program (CoT Urban Forestry) and a local nonprofit. The goal of this Program is to enhance community engagement, provide education, and support the growth and stewardship of Tacoma’s urban forest by reducing barriers and expanding programming to underserved and overburdened neighborhoods throughout Tacoma. Through a competitive bidding process, the Tacoma Tree Foundation (TTF) was awarded the contract for the Community Tree Program in mid-2023.

The Community Tree Program (CTP) is committed to delivering impactful tree planting opportunities and related educational programs driven by a foundation of equitable community engagement. This ensures consistent service delivery to Tacoma residents who face inter-woven challenges of low tree canopy, vulnerability to high-heat events, and thus disproportionate health impacts.

Critical components to the Community Tree Program:
- A community-centered approach to building authentic relationships with diverse audiences
- Training and workshops that aim to expand knowledge and enhance the technical skills of the community
- Tree programs that lower barriers to tree planting
- Volunteer engagement that cultivates a robust cohort of volunteers and tree stewards that help facilitate the preservation, planting, and care of Tacoma's urban forest
- Community outreach and feedback that generate interest in current and new programming, along with conducting surveys, assist in updating approaches and services
- Community appreciation events and incentives that celebrate our community and taking time to reflect on achievements.
**Partnership & Collaboration**

The City’s Urban Forestry Program aims to facilitate the connection between people, trees, and the natural environment while building community and is guided by the goals and actions outlined in the Urban Forest Management Plan.

Urban forestry initiatives thrive when government organizations and community-based groups work together. Through partnership, each can leverage unique resources, skill sets, and expertise to tailor projects, programs, and strategies to specific community needs. Together we can enhance public participation, build trust within the community, and ensure the long-term sustainability and vibrancy of the urban forest and Tacoma as a whole.

“Community engagement and involvement are critical to the success of our efforts to grow Tacoma’s tree canopy. I urge everyone across our community to join us in this important work.” Deputy Mayor Kristina Walker.

**City of Tacoma, Urban Forestry’s Role**

- **Policy Alignment:** Coordination between stakeholders and residents to align actions and strategies with adopted policy such as the Urban Forest Management Plan (UFMP) to meet goals and maximize impact.
- **Resource Allocation and Funding:** allocate resources to support the CTP
  - Funding for administration of program ($75,000 annually)
  - Coordinating & providing material costs (up to $25,000 annually) such as: trees, arbor ties, tree stakes, TAGRO, mulch, watering bags/buckets, signage, printed collateral, food on a case-by-case basis, and advertising costs associated with this program;
- **Capacity and Technical Assistance**
  - Technical support such as training, technical assistance for on-site placement of trees, and/or content review of training materials.
  - Data support such as coordinating resources for tasks that the City can perform more easily, such as GIS mapping, generating mailing lists, and managing the TreePlotter mapping platform.
  - Submitting permit requests for right-of-way trees planted through this program.
  - Leveraging Existing Programs such as Depave, Language Access resources, and other City-led efforts that address barriers to participation from compacted planting areas to lack of information in languages other than English.

*City of Tacoma, Urban Forestry Staff*
Tacoma Tree Foundation’s Role

TTF possesses the community presence needed to excite the public about the benefits of our urban forest, to engage folks in caring for urban trees, and to listen and gather feedback on what barriers and challenges exist in the community. TTF’s role in the CTP includes:

- **Directing Communication:** developing a communications strategy for the CTP that includes utilizing channels such as social media, newsletters, educational materials, and community events to promote the program.

- **Community Engagement:** TTF serves as the community connector for the program, sharing about the program and communicating with residents. Strategies include tabling at public events, posting flyers in neighborhoods, and going door-to-door to speak with residents.

- **Participant & Volunteer Coordination and Management:** recruiting, training, and managing volunteers to support CTP activities and events. Responsibilities also include direct coordination with homeowners participating in tree planting activities.

- **Event Coordination and Management:** planning, execution, and management of various events ranging from tree planting events, trainings, and volunteer celebrations.

- **Tracking and Reporting:** Robust data tracking and reporting mechanisms are essential for evaluating the efficacy of CTP activities, approaches, measuring progress, and informing future decision-making. TTF assumes the responsibility of collecting, analyzing, and reporting data related to tree planting, outreach, and community engagement activities.

"Partnerships are key to the success of our long-range efforts to make Tacoma a more livable city for all. I look forward to seeing what we can do through the Community Tree Program with the support of our partners at the Tacoma Tree Foundation." Mayor Victoria Woodards.
About Tacoma Tree Foundation

The Tacoma Tree Foundation (TTF) is a nonprofit organization focused on educating, empowering, and supporting community greening efforts in the Greater Tacoma area, Pierce County, and the watersheds of the Puget Sound. Our vision is to see trees in every neighborhood, healthy vibrant and cohesive communities that sustain tree planting, tree care and tree education—neighbors helping neighbors to grow a greener, healthier, and more connected Greater Tacoma.

The Tacoma Tree Foundation’s theory of change is that when we build trust and relationships, we build community investment, and that will lead to opportunities for growing the urban forest in a sustainable way. We believe that everyone wants a beautiful and healthy place to live. Urban trees provide a host of community benefits that make communities healthier. In our experience, offering people the chance to talk about how they would make their local environments greener leads to healthier and more connected neighborhoods.

Tacoma Tree Foundation believes in meeting people where they are and giving them ownership over what their communities will look like, trusting them to use the resources we provide to make great decisions that will lead to greener and healthier environments. Both Tacoma Tree Foundation and the city at large stand to benefit from the increased capacity to plant trees in communities with low tree equity. Recent data from the City of Tacoma, Washington State Department of Health, and American Forests show a strong correlation between lack of tree canopy and low health outcomes, which tracks with our history of selective disinvestment.

Tacoma Tree Foundation at the culmination of Branch Out.
COMMUNITY TREE PROGRAM OVERVIEW

- 515 Trees Distributed
- 152 Volunteers engaged
- 42 Residents trained
- 377 Volunteer hours
- 40% Trees volunteer planted
- 35% Return Volunteers
- 204 Households received trees
- 21 Youth engaged
- 13 Community Outreach Events
- 4.6 Acres of mature tree canopy added
- 86% of trees were distributed to neighborhoods of focus

Primary neighborhoods included
Eastside, South End, South Tacoma, Hilltop
MAJOR ACTIVITIES

Community Engagement

Promotion of Community Tree Program at Community Events.
TTF staff attended 13 community events in the following priority neighborhoods in 2023. We dedicated over 100 hours of direct engagement by attending these events and engaging with over 700 people.

- Central:
  - Tacoma Rainiers STEM night (9/22)
- Downtown:
  - Ocean Fest at Foss Waterway Seaport Museum (6/4)
  - Tacoma Pride Festival & Earth Gay (7/8, 7/22)
  - Camptoberfest at Campfire Coffee (9/30)
  - Broadway Farmers’ Market (9/7, 9/21, 10/26)
  - Sustainability Expo (4/22)
- Eastside:
  - Stewart Heights Community Resource Fair (9/7)
  - HONK Fest (10/21)
- Hilltop:
  - Hilltop Street Fair (8/26)
- South End:
  - Stafford Art Night (6/8)
- South Tacoma (none)
- Program of most interest was Green Blocks: McKinley Hill
  - Neighbors referring each other to the program after tree request deadlines
  - Neighbors inquiring about the program during the planting event.
- Reoccurring themes in conversations with residents:
  - Tree species and care details; concern with size and maintenance
  - Residents concerned with neighbors who lack trees
  - Renters with uninterested/concerned landlords and vice versa.
Online Engagement

Online engagement plays a pivotal role in disseminating information about the Community Tree Program, and effective digital engagement requires investment of time. Social media creates a space where community members can engage directly by asking questions about events, programs, and general tree topics. TTF maintains accounts on Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. In 2023, TTF staff created the following online engagement pieces directly supporting the Community Tree Program:

- 60 posts or reels promoting various programs and events.
  - 18 of those were permanent posts that remain visible to users.
  - 42 temporary, “in-the-moment” posts were published and circulated via the "Story" function on Instagram and Facebook.

### MAJOR ACTIVITIES

**Instagram post and caption for Branch Out Tree Share**

**Branch Out**

**Address:**
Stafford Elementary
Playground: 1015 S 92nd St,
Tacoma, WA 98444

**Event Date:**
November 4, 2023
**Request Trees by:**
October 15th, 2023

Help grow Tacoma’s tree canopy and take home free trees for your property! Trees will be available for pick up Saturday, November 4. If you need delivery or planting assistance, volunteer support is available upon request. Priority will be given to Hilltop, Eastside, South End, and South Tacoma zip codes, but all are welcome to apply.

We believe that everyone deserves tree-lined streets! Each Branch Out tree that is planted helps “rediscover community” grow healthier, happier, and greener in the face of pollution and extreme weather.

Help us find tree heroes for our free trees by recruiting one for your neighborhood or yard or by signing up to volunteer! Either by volunteering or planting a tree of your own, you will be participating in neighborhood-based greening and joining a community of passionate tree advocates.

You can sign up or request trees at [https://tacomatreefoundation.org/branch-out](https://tacomatreefoundation.org/branch-out)

Branch Out is a tree giveaway collaboration between multiple community partners to collectively grow the Tacoma area urban forest. Our intent is to light and call out the intersection of trees, human health, equity, and community building. Past and present community partners include: Homeward Center, Rainier Village, YMCA McCarver, TransAlta, Tacoma Public Schools, Pierce Conservation District, City of Tacoma Urban Forestry Program, and Pierce County Parks.

Funding for Branch Out is provided by the City of Tacoma, Pierce Conservation District, and Pierce County Parks.

 insignificant
TTF’s signature Green Blocks program is an intensive community engagement and tree planting effort that takes place in select neighborhoods with low tree equity across the Tacoma area. Engagement activities include canvassing, tabling, cooperating with partner organizations, volunteer mobilization, and building relationships with residents. Green Blocks offers not only free trees but also tree delivery, volunteer training, residential planting assistance, and watering tools. Prior to Fall 2023, Green Blocks was implemented in the Tacoma Mall neighborhood, in partnership with the City of Tacoma Urban Forestry program (Fall 2022), and in Parkland, in partnership with Pierce County (Spring 2023).

“Many people didn’t know they had control of the right-of-way, so it was empowering to tell them they could make an impact there.”
-Kirsten, TTF staff
The Neighborhood
In Fall 2023, Green Blocks was hosted in the McKinley Hill neighborhood determined by the City of Tacoma’s Community Tree Map rating this part of Tacoma’s Eastside as having low tree equity and opportunity compared to the rest of the city. In Fall 2022, the City’s Neighborhood Planning Program had conducted a community survey throughout McKinley Hill, in which residents indicated that tree planting outreach was the community’s biggest priority for green enhancement. Selecting McKinley Hill for the 2023 Green Blocks location was a direct response to the community’s request for more green enhancement. The project boundaries were defined by I-5 to the north, East M Street to the east, East 48th Street to the south, and State Route 7 to the west.

- McKinley’s Environmental Health Index is rated as Very Low.
- The McKinley Hill project area makes up five census blocks rated “Very Low” to “Low” on the Equity Index. Further, within the Environmental Health indicies, the project area rates “Very Low” with environmental health indicators revealing greater exposure to air pollution and urban heat.
- The project area has an average of 19% tree canopy cover and is one of the hottest neighborhoods in the City due to the Urban Heat Island Effect.
- 8,042 Tacomans live in the project area, including 1,712 children and young adults (0-19 years old) and 777 adults aged 65+ years.
- 36% of residents have low incomes and 20% are living below the poverty line.
- 40% of residents are people of color and 23% identify as Hispanic or Latino.
Community Engagement Approaches

Green Blocks: McKinley Hill focused on greening and community building in the McKinley Hill neighborhood, specifically through tree planting in the right-of-way at residential properties. In Tacoma, a major limitation to planting is that the adjacent property owner is responsible for the care and continued maintenance of street trees. To plant street trees, individual property owner consent is required. The most effective strategy to garner program interest and obtain this consent is a multi-faceted engagement approach with different touch points. Our initial goal was to plant 250 trees across 100 households within the project area. The primary engagement approaches were as follows:

- Mailers. Around 2500 specialized mailers were sent to every property owner* in the project area. The mailers included detachable tree request forms that residents could mail back to project staff, with postage paid by the City. The mailers also included a QR code that linked to the project web page. Over 50 paper forms were submitted, while the QR code received 265 clicks. (NOTE: *While many residents are renters, it is the property owners who receive the mailers because their permission is required for tree planting to take place. High rates of rentership in low-income neighborhoods represent another barrier to tree planting.)

- Canvassing by volunteers. Prior efforts by the City of Tacoma Neighborhood Planning Program had established relationships with community leaders, which was instrumental for TTF’s ability to connect with interested residents. Participants in the City’s McKinley Hill Neighborhood planning process had previously indicated that greening was a top 5 priority for their vision of the neighborhood. TTF leveraged those relationships in order to spread the word about the opportunity for residents to receive free street trees. Upon request, TTF facilitated a community engagement training to share information about the Green Blocks program to better equip residents to talk to their neighbors about the many benefits of trees. (One very passionate resident declared it his mission to recruit 200 participants by himself!)

- Canvassing by TTF staff. Over the course of six weeks in August and September, TTF staff walked every block of the McKinley Hill neighborhood, posting flyers, knocking on doors, and having conversations with residents. This face-to-face approach accounted for a high number of registrations.

“Thank you for sending the mailer. I love trees! I’m going to tell all my neighbors.”
- Becca, McKinley Hill Resident

“Three people came to my door and they were very nice and informative.” - Stacy, McKinley Hill Resident

TTF canvassing McKinley Hill
Green Blocks: McKinley Hill
How participants connected with the program.

- 40% Mail Advertisement
- 27% Community Events
- 13% Social Media & Word of Mouth
- 5% Email from TTF
- 15% Other
Site Evaluation & Preparation

Once a homeowner indicates interest and provides consent, site visits are conducted to evaluate and prepare the right-of-way for street trees. Before confirming tree species and quantities, TTF staff conducted site visits to around 150 properties where residents had indicated interest in trees. During these site assessments, TTF staff noted the presence of utilities such as power lines and fire hydrants, measured the width of the planting areas, marked potential tree planting locations according to tree placement standards, and provided tree species recommendations according to “Right Tree, Right Place” standards. They then communicated not only with the residents but also with the utility locating services to request locates on behalf of residents.

Additionally, Urban Forestry & Environmental Services staff assessed the same properties for the presence of compacted gravel in the right-of-way, where tree planting would not have been advised. To increase tree planting opportunities in the project area, City staff incorporated the Depave Program into additional services offered as part of Green Blocks: McKinley Hill. This allowed 18 additional homeowners to participate in tree planting who otherwise would not have been eligible due to poor site conditions. Environmental Services crews removed compacted soils and integrated soil amendments, which created 33 additional tree planting locations across 18 households.

The presence of compacted soils represents yet another barrier to planting trees in Eastside Tacoma. Offering depaving services increased access to tree planting; however, this component was time-intensive for TTF due to navigating correspondences between CoT and clients and resulted in multiple site visits and confirmations. This will be further evaluated in future years.

During the registration process, residents were allowed to request not only free trees, but also planting assistance from volunteers. Moreover, all residents received free delivery of trees and supporting materials. This delivery service was provided by the City’s Urban Forestry staff and TTF partners.

“I noticed my neighbor also got trees delivered but they missed the opportunity to enroll for planting assistance. So, I volunteered to plant it for them. We have matching ginkgo trees and I'll be helping care for this elderly couple's trees! Thank you for supporting McKinley!” - Nate, Tacoma Resident
Tree Planting (the fun part!)

The Green Blocks: McKinley Hill tree planting activity took place on Green Tacoma Day, October 14th. Green Tacoma Day is an annual day of service that offers great opportunities for the Tacoma community to get to know each other and our local green spaces and to help protect and restore natural spaces in their neighborhoods.

Through Green Blocks: McKinley Hill, we distributed 234 trees to 110 households in the area. Our 56 volunteers planted 156 of those trees with and for residents.

- An additional 59 households initially requested trees but opted not to participate. Some property owners had sites that were not conducive to planting, some preferred to plant on private property instead of the right-of-way, and a few did not confirm their participation or stopped communicating with program staff.
- 238 Trees were requested and 234 Trees Delivered (98%)
- 26 residents who received trees signed up to volunteer for planting trees in the future
- At least 25 residents engaged their children in helping plant the trees, watched the trees being planted, or directly participated in planting with volunteers.
- While we exceeded our goal of 100 households, we fell just short of the goal of planting 250 trees. These numbers reflect both the demand for the Community Tree Program and also the challenges of planting trees in the right-of-way in a neighborhood like McKinley Hill, with so many residents dropping out after site assessments and utility locates.

TTF Volunteers and staff gathering before planting trees in McKinley Hill.
Branch Out

Branch Out is an annual free tree giveaway event put on by multiple partnering organizations whose goal is to increase tree canopy across Tacoma and Pierce County. The program seeks to uplift and call out the intersection of trees, human health, equity, and community building. Our third Branch Out event was held on November 4, 2023, at the Helen B. Stafford Elementary School (1615 South 92nd Street). Partnering organizations (and roles) included:

- Tacoma Tree Foundation (community engagement, event promotion, volunteer recruitment and management, supervision of planting activities, language support, and fruit tree procurement/potting)
- City of Tacoma (tree acquisition, managing tree requests, trees & material delivery to event location, trees & material delivery to residents, walk-up event coordination, and language ambassador coordination)
- Pierce County (tree acquisition and deliveries to residents outside Tacoma city limits*)
- Pierce Conservation District (managing tree requests, tree & material delivery to residents, data management, planting event support)
- Tacoma Public Schools (permissions and hosting)
- SunAlliance (community engagement support)
- Language Ambassadors—Katelyn Huynh, Iuliia Didkivska, Svetlana Konotopchik, and Sandra Garibaldi (translation and interpretation for speakers of other languages)

Prior to the event, TTF received a donation of 200 fruit trees from Rain Tree nursery. These trees were potted by 25 volunteers at 3 “potting parties.” Two of these parties occurred at the Environmental Services Plant Holding Facility, while the third took place at a youth summer camp in the Salishan neighborhood.

“There are no trees on our whole block. I would really love for that to change and for there to be shade for my son and the kids in our neighborhood.”
- Branch Out Tree Request

Trees ready for pick-up at Branch Out
At Branch Out, residents of Pierce County and the City of Tacoma were able to take home trees that they reserved in advance. Additionally, residents were offered “walk up” trees on a first-come, first-served basis. Participants received tree supplies to assist with tree maintenance, including stakes, tree ties, and watering buckets. The event also served as a gathering place and launching point for volunteer groups who assisted homeowners with planting trees that were delivered earlier in the week. Following a volunteer planting orientation by TTF staff, representatives from each partnering organization gave short introductory speeches.

Language ambassadors were available for translation assistance in Spanish, Vietnamese, Ukrainian, and Russian. This multilingual engagement was essential to this community event and is described more in detail in the “Equity and Environmental Justice Impacts” section below.

In total, 94 different households participated in Branch Out within Tacoma city limits. 281 trees were distributed to City of Tacoma residents, including 202 shade trees and 79 fruit trees. 44 of those trees were planted by CTP volunteers.

*Note: Data for non-Tacoma residents is not included in the totals for the Community Tree Program. No City funds were directed to residents outside city limits.

This was the Branch Out vision crafted by the group last year: Branch Out is a tree giveaway collaboration between multiple community partners to collectively grow the Tacoma-area urban forest. Our intent is to uplift and call out the intersection of trees, human health, equity, and community building.

“We want to add native and adapted trees to our side yard. Our area of East Tacoma is sorely lacking in equitable tree canopy within the City of Tacoma including street trees and we have room to plant trees to help increase tree canopy and reduce heat island effect, add to biodiversity and impact neighborhood pride and greenery.” - Branch Out Tree Request
Urban Forestry Community Events

**Grit City Trees webinars**

To increase participation in the City of Tacoma’s Grit City Trees (GCT) program, TTF hosted 2 informational webinars, one in English and one in Spanish. The webinars took place on Saturday, August 5, 2023, approximately one month prior to the application deadline.

The goal of the webinars was to provide clarity on the application process. Because of funding, permitting, and liability constraints, there are many facets to the application process—such as understanding what is eligible right-of-way, how to locate utilities, etc.—which can create barriers to participation. The English webinar was attended by 5 people on Zoom and received an additional 40 views on YouTube. The Spanish webinar was attended by 0 live participants but received 8 views on YouTube. While the total number of viewers seems low (53 total), it is more significant in the context of total program participation (51 households applied for GCT in 2023). This suggests that residents may have viewed the webinars to better understand the process, or to consider whether the program was the right one for them.
Tree Stewards Training
Growing the urban forest requires strong city codes, planting and caring for trees, and also a web of tree stewards who are trained in tree care, tree policy, and talking with their neighbors about tree benefits. TTF’s free Tree Stewards program is an effort to grow this web of local tree advocates. Through TTF’s one-day training program, stewards learn proper planting techniques, tree care best practices, local regulations, and how to answer tree-related questions. Tree Stewards help implement and maintain neighborhood plantings by, for instance, identifying trees in need of water or pruning. Taught by TTF Founder and Certified Arborist Sarah Low, the 6-hour training in September 2023 equipped 9 new stewards with the skills they need to engage their communities in discussions about urban forestry, and to protect, maintain, and advocate for tree canopy coverage in Tacoma. This level of participation was just short of our goal of 10 people receiving 8 hours of training.

In past trainings, we noticed that participants’ energy levels would decline later in the day. In order to alleviate this, we included a pre-workshop online session and a post-workshop online session. The thinking was that if some of the more content-heavy parts could be accomplished online, it would free up more in-person time for questions and interactions. Unfortunately, few trainees attended the Zoom sessions; while they were asked to view the recordings, it was unclear whether they all did so. We will continue to refine the workshop model in order to balance scheduling (with a single-day format being easiest for residents) with comprehensiveness in content (with so many tree-related topics to cover).

“It was so refreshing to be around like-minded souls who have a true appreciation for the positive effect of trees and green spaces to people, animals, and our future.” - Anonymous Tree Steward Feedback

Tree Stewards 2023
**Tree Captains Training**
Tree Captains are volunteer leaders who help grow urban canopy by leading tree planting teams during large events, such as Green Blocks and Branch Out. Through our 1.5 hour training, Captains learn how to plant trees, understand regulations, interact with residents, and provide a good volunteer experience for others. On planting day, Captains are on-site leaders who help guide their volunteer groups on best management practices of tree planting and placement. We held a Tree Captains Training at the EnviroHouse on Saturday, October 7th. In all, five new Tree Captains were trained in 2023.

**Technical Workshop**
Tree care is just as important as planting and distributing trees, and this year we hosted a tree care workshop on the topic: “Structural Pruning.” The intended audience was homeowners whose trees were planted 3–5 years ago and were therefore ready to be inspected to determine if pruning for structure is needed. Residents learned that by pruning at this stage, trees develop a strong structure early on, are more likely to have an extended and healthier life, and require less corrective pruning as they mature.

Email invitations were sent to participants from City-funded programs like Grit City Trees and the Urban Tree Sale. The 1-hour workshop was led by Sarah Low and took place on Zoom, on December 13th, with 60 people registered, 23 of whom attended. An additional 83 people viewed the presentation on the TTF YouTube channel.

“I learned about branch unions, tree behavior and more of the things I have seen but never understood. Thank you.” - Anonymous technical training feedback

**Community Appreciation**
We celebrated our volunteers’ support of the Community Tree Program with a hot cocoa bar, slide show, raffle, storytelling activity, and remarks from TTF staff on December 6th at the Union Club. 24 volunteers and family attended on a dark winter evening.

A volunteer sharing a memory at the Community Appreciation event.
The Community Tree Program’s focus is to steward Tacoma’s urban forest by reducing barriers and expanding programming to underserved and overburdened neighborhoods throughout Tacoma.

In 2023, The Community Tree Program’s focus areas were “Priority Neighborhoods”, as defined in the City’s Tacoma Community Forestry Map and Tree Planting Prioritization Tool. Priority neighborhoods are defined as (1) being moderate, low, and very low according to the Equity Index (2) having low tree canopy, and (3) having high urban heat. Intentionally focusing on these areas will ensure these communities have an active role in stewarding Tacoma’s urban forest and improving our program’s accessibility and cultural relevance.

Guided by the CTP vision, we provide educational information and activities at each event to enhance awareness regarding the importance of healthy urban forests; to highlight the intersection of trees, equity, and human health; and to foster connections between community members and their urban forests.

We also acknowledge Native presence and stewardship of the land at each event by highlighting the current and historical impacts of colonization on Puyallup Tribal land.

“We gratefully honor and acknowledge that we rest on the traditional lands of the Puyallup People. The Puyallup people have lived on this land since the beginning of time. They are still here today. They live, work, raise their children, take care of their community, practice their traditional ways and speak the Twulshootseed language–just as their ancestors did.”

Community outreach table.
Significant efforts have been directed to low opportunity areas, with 86% of all trees distributed through the Community Tree Program falling within these Priority Neighborhoods. More specifically, 72% of all Branch Out trees and 100% of Green Blocks trees were distributed to these areas.

“I am a renter in section 8 housing and a single mother to a 6-year-old. Having trees in the yard where I grew up allowed for so much fun and creativity, for a strong bond with nature and overall health. I really would love for my son to have that same experience. I am partially disabled; we would need volunteers to help. If my landlord approves this, I would like fruit trees because it would be nice for future generations to be able to harvest the trees if they want/need to.” -Sarah, Tacoma Resident
Multilingual Community Engagement

Authentic relationship-building with diverse audiences is critical to developing equitable engagement. Multilingual community engagement is critical to reaching, involving, and engaging underrepresented and overburdened communities. Recognizing the importance of equitable engagement and language access in programming, the City allocated additional dollars and staff time to support multilingual aspects of the Community Tree Program. We employed various multilingual engagement strategies across different platforms.

First, we established relationships with four “Language Ambassadors”, via the City’s Language Access Program Coordinator. A Language Ambassador is a community member who is fully bilingual and possesses language skills that can offer full cultural translations that are completely understood and maintain the original meaning and intent. Ambassadors have extensive networks in the community and can share nuances of how specific language-speaking groups in Tacoma communicate with one another in terms of dialects, behaviors, gathering places, social media, and digital application uses. Ambassadors attended a “State of Tacoma’s Urban Forest” presentation and were invited to provide perspectives on the City’s 2030 canopy goals.

This group determined the following priorities for an urban forestry language access pilot project:

- Multilingual tree education materials, specifically on tree placement guidelines.
- Multilingual outreach at gathering places significant to specific language-speaking communities.
- To create an event or opportunity to engage interested individuals in stewarding Tacoma’s urban forests, offering translation services on-site to ensure full participation.

This collaboration allowed us to understand that multilingual outreach is not just about providing language materials, it is also about creating meaningful connections within those communities. Their presence at events is essential to building trust and creating a path for participation.” - Adela Ramos, TTF Staff

Four language ambassadors with TTF and CoT staff at Branch Out (Left to Right) Adela Ramos (TTF), Iuliia Didkivska, Svetlana Konotopchik, Sandra Garibaldi, Katelyn Huynh, and Lisa Kenny (CoT).
Language Ambassadors provided Spanish, Ukrainian, Vietnamese, and Russian translations for print resources on tree placement standards as well as an event flyer for Branch Out, totaling 31 hours spent on translating print material. Additionally, the Tacoma Tree Foundation website provides overviews of urban forestry goals and programming in Spanish and Korean.

Leading up to the Branch Out event, Ambassadors conducted focused outreach within their respective language-speaking communities. This outreach effort comprised 27 hours of direct engagement, including phone calls, text messages, a presentation at the Eastside Community Center, distribution of flyers at key gathering locations, and more.

During our Branch Out event, Ambassadors provided interpretation in Russian, Ukrainian, Vietnamese, and Spanish to assist residents with tree selection, tree placement, answered other tree care questions. Over ten families, spanning our four focus languages, actively participated and benefitted from language support. Ambassadors dedicated 28 hours to providing in-person translation and general event support. In addition, tree planting assistance was provided in Spanish for residents who needed it. The collaboration with Ambassadors significantly contributed to our event’s success, drawing in participants that otherwise would not be reached. One resident expressed surprise at only now discovering tree incentive programs after living in Tacoma for 25 years. This testimony not only highlights the impact of these community connections, but underscores the effectiveness of the Ambassadors’ engagement efforts.
Through the Language Access Pilot Project, the Community Tree Program gained insights into the essence of multilingual outreach, which requires equal investment in translating materials, building trust, and creating meaningful community connections. There is understandable distrust of the government, with some participants reluctant to provide personal information and addresses, for example. Ambassadors allowed us to translate the intent of collecting information—to measure participation and equity impacts—which ultimately made individuals comfortable enough to provide this information. Building authentic relationships with community members through multilingual outreach opens a door to trust and engagement. The presence of Language Ambassadors at Branch Out was essential to building this trust and created a real path to participation for several communities previously disconnected from our work.

“I own the property and the resident is my mom, she has arthritis and is Spanish speaking only. Because you sent a Spanish speaking volunteer to plant the trees, she was able to ask questions and be a part of the planting. Thank you.” - Rosa, Tacoma Resident

Planting Assistance
Planting Assistance is a cornerstone of our efforts to lower barriers to access and engagement. Recognizing that tree planting requires time, tools, knowledge and physical ability (resources not accessible to everyone), both our Branch Out and Green Blocks opportunities provided planting assistance to those in need.

As part of the CTP vision to engage community members in the holistic process of caring for urban trees, Tacoma Tree Foundation recruits and trains Tree Captains and other community volunteers to provide engaging and friendly tree planting assistance. In the CTP’s first year, our Branch Out event provided planting assistance to 16 households totaling 45 trees. Our Green Blocks: McKinley Hill effort provided planting assistance to 101 households, planting 156 trees.

“I can’t plant my own tree because I just received knee surgery. Your planting assistance is the only way I’ll be able to get a tree on our property. I care for my young granddaughter and our yard feels unsafe and exposed. I really want her to have a tree. Thank you.”
- Diane, Tacoma Resident

Tree planting with a resident.
**Participant Demographics**

Collecting demographic information is essential in ensuring that the Community Tree Program is impactful, equitable, and responsive to community needs. By gathering this data, we can assess the program's reach, identify any disparities or gaps in services, and demonstrate accountability to stakeholders. It's important to note that all demographic data was collected anonymously and presented as optional. In 2023, data was collected for tree planting participants in Branch Out and Green Blocks: McKinley Hill, but not for volunteers or educational program participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>City of Tacoma 2023</th>
<th>Green Blocks McKinley</th>
<th>Branch Out</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>61% White</td>
<td>70% White</td>
<td>66% White</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10% Black or African American</td>
<td>3% Black or African American</td>
<td>6% Black or African American</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1% American Indian or Alaska Native</td>
<td>7% American Indian or Alaska Native</td>
<td>1% Native American</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8% Asian</td>
<td>9% Asian</td>
<td>3% Asian</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12% Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>6% Latino</td>
<td>7% Latino</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4% Other</td>
<td>1% Middle-Eastern</td>
<td>3% other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11% Multiracial</td>
<td>3% other</td>
<td>9% preferred not to say</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comparing the data provided above illustrates that the Community Tree Program reaches a majority white audience with a significant portion of the Black/African American, Asian and Latino populations still to be engaged or made to feel comfortable sharing demographic information. This also highlights an inconsistency with which racial categories are collected in each program versus City of Tacoma census. To improve equitable, community-focused urban forestry outcomes, Tacoma Tree Foundation will continue to invest in community-based partnerships from underrepresented communities, provide multilingual resources, and communicate the Community Tree Program's commitment to equity. Tacoma Tree Foundation will also strive to consistently collect data that reflects the City of Tacoma’s data, so that the program can accurately analyze its impact in these communities.
Demand for Programs

Through community engagement, providing tree matching services, and visiting program participants’ properties for guidance on tree placement and species, it was clear that most residents could benefit from more trees than they were requesting. Either because the resident was unaware of planting guidelines or the tree species placement restrictions, most residents requested fewer trees than space allowed. With constraints on time, funding, and staff/volunteer capacity, it was a challenge to meet the specific needs of each resident.

Private Property

The Community Tree Program has demonstrated that urban trees have broad public benefits. The funding source for the City’s tree planting programs include the Stormwater Utility Fund as well as the General Fund. Both of these funding sources bring with them the requirement to demonstrate public benefit for the programs and services offered—specifically, public dollars must be spent for public benefit, and not just private gain. Unfortunately, restricting tree planting opportunities to only the right-of-way, where the most obvious public benefit can be demonstrated, upholds one of the biggest barriers to tree planting. Trees and the benefits to the larger community transcend public and private property boundaries. If the restriction of providing only right-of-way trees were removed, the impact of this program could potentially expand exponentially.

In 2023 there were missed opportunities for increasing tree canopy cover. For example, during Green Block site visits 18% of homeowners who expressed interest in trees were ultimately denied because of infrastructure limitations outside of their control. The top 3 most common conflicts in the right-of-way were: utility conflicts, limited space (right-of-way too small to support healthy tree growth), and the presence of pavement or compacted soils.

The Tacoma Tree Foundation suggests looking for new and creative ways to supplement existing funding to increase planting locations. Some examples may include finding supplemental funding through grants or private donations to be able to provide trees for private properties. Alternatively, the purchase of smaller trees, which represent a smaller financial investment, would increase the cost-to-benefit ratio for demonstrating public benefit on private property. Expanding beyond the right-of-way to plant in places like residential backyards, places of worship, community centers, and small business properties would both support expanding Tacoma’s tree canopy and encourage community participation in greening efforts that meet their unique needs.
Lessons Learned

With each event and community dynamic, there are lessons to be learned. The following are just some examples of the valuable lessons learned that will inform the Community Tree Program in future years’ implementation.

- Effective community engagement strategies:
  - Mailers and door-knocking successfully reach new program participants.
  - Language services lower barriers for participants from overburdened communities.
  - Tabling at public events allows people to self-select and meet us where they are.

- Participant engagement and “on-site” support:
  - Engaging with residents requires several touchpoints, including explanation of program details and limitations, as well as communicating recommendations based on a site evaluation.
  - On-site support includes: evaluating right-of-way spaces for tree planting, recommending suitable trees, assisting in utility locates, providing optional planting assistance, and sharing follow-up tree care resources.
  - Challenges such as incomplete utility markings and late requests for tree planting assistance necessitated post-event planting. We learned that having a contingency plan for late requests was helpful, including having alternative programs for residents to take advantage of.
  - Providing post-event resources, appreciations, and participant surveys often result in continued support, problem solving and connection.

- Culturally relevant pathways to participate in programming such as funded language access initiatives and potentially sourcing culturally relevant trees.
  - Language Ambassadors recommended specific trees of interest to their respective cultures, with a particular interest in fruit/nut-producing trees such as: apple, pear, cherry, plum, apricot, persimmon, durazno (peach), tejocote (mexican hawthorn), higos (figs), and nuevces de castilla (walnut).

“"The property adjacent to us is currently being developed. Now all of the trees are gone leaving us with very little privacy. We’ve been working to attract pollinators and birds, and seeing these creatures lose their habitat and food supply was heartbreaking. Your program has helped us to replenish their shelter and food sources! Thank you!” - Ryan, Tacoma Resident
Creative solutions needed to supplement ROW tree planting:
- Creating additional tree planting opportunities—through other funding sources like grant or donations—to capture the delta of homeowners, willing participants of tree planting initiatives, who run into infrastructure limitations like compacted and/or narrow right-of-ways, utility conflicts, and space limitations for larger trees.

Volunteers are critical to the implementation of the Community Tree Program.
- Successful volunteer engagement requires community involvement, training, data tracking, and celebration. In 2023, we benefited from a high level of community involvement and demand for the CTP, a dynamic we hope will continue across our priority neighborhoods in the future.

Renters and landlords need more dynamic support for when one or the other lacks the interest and/or ability to plant and care for trees.
- For instance, renters can provide landlords with information on the benefits of trees and availability of free resources, while landlords can commit to caring for newly planted trees. In 2023, we saw some instances of both, but we suspect that focusing on this key relationship could increase participation in future years.

Tacoma’s urban forest is a valuable asset that will continue to add to the health of our community for generations to come. We are all under "One Canopy" and benefit from the proper care and enhancement of the trees in Tacoma.

Tree planting volunteers
Conclusion

The Community Tree Program serves to empower residents to actively steward Tacoma’s urban forest by providing education on the benefits of trees, engaging residents in the holistic care of urban trees, involving youth in our efforts, and prioritizing neighborhoods of greatest need based on data analysis. To achieve this goal, we aim to reduce barriers to participation, thereby expanding tree programming.

Through collaborative efforts between the Tacoma Tree Foundation and the City of Tacoma Urban Forestry, the Community Tree Program successfully distributed trees to 204 households, totaling 515 trees throughout Tacoma. If established, these trees will add 4.6 acres of mature tree canopy. 86% of the total trees distributed went to Priority Neighborhoods, with 40% being planted by 137 community volunteers. Furthermore, 42 residents received education and training on tree care practices.

Our outreach efforts included participating in 22 community events across 5 different Tacoma neighborhoods (Central, Downtown, Eastside, Hilltop, and South End) engaging with approximately 700 community members.

Our community-centered approach—such as providing additional services to homeowners along with culturally relevant support—built authentic relationships with diverse audiences, lowered barriers to participation, and led to meaningful engagement and participation. Training and workshops provided enhanced technical skills and knowledge to the community. Robust volunteer engagement cultivated strong cohorts of volunteers and Tree Stewards that helped to facilitate the preservation, planting, and care of Tacoma’s urban forest. A variety of community outreach activities and frequent feedback platforms generated interest in current and new programming while updating new approaches and services. Joyful and engaging community appreciation events and incentives that celebrate our community were hosted and the team took time to reflect on achievements together.
The Tacoma Tree Foundation’s theory of change is that when we build trust and relationships, we build community investment, and that will lead to opportunities for growing the urban forest in a sustainable way. We believe that everyone wants a beautiful and healthy place to live. The Community Tree Program provided vibrant opportunities for communities to connect with each other and the urban tree canopy.

Guided by the Community Tree Program’s intent to adapt approaches and services to be responsive to community feedback, we will continue to collect feedback, participant stories and impacts as well as their demographic data in order to tell compelling and engaging stories about the Community Tree Program’s community impact. We are committed to enhancing community engagement, education, growth, and stewardship of Tacoma’s urban forest by reducing barriers and expanding programming to underserved and overburdened neighborhoods throughout Tacoma.

Our future has trees in every neighborhood, healthy vibrant and cohesive communities that sustain tree planting, tree care and tree education. Neighbors helping neighbors to grow a greener, healthier, and more connected Greater Tacoma, Pierce County and the watersheds of Puget Sound.
MEET THE TEAM

Lisa Kenny (she/her)  
City of Tacoma, Urban Forestry  
Community Tree Program Coordinator  

Lowell Wyse (he/him)  
Tacoma Tree Foundation  
Executive Director  

Mike Carey (he/him)  
City of Tacoma, Urban Forestry  
Urban Forest Program Manager  

Jaala Smith (she/they)  
Tacoma Tree Foundation  
Planting Coordinator  

Ryan Hebert (he/him)  
City of Tacoma, Urban Forestry  
Forestry Analyst  

Adela Ramos (she/her)  
Tacoma Tree Foundation  
Directors of Partnerships and Communications
Thank you for supporting the Tacoma Community Tree Program.

Tacoma Tree Foundation
WWW.TACOMATREEFOUNDATION.ORG

City of Tacoma, Urban Forestry
WWW.CITYOFTACOMA.ORG/COMMUNITYTREEPROGRAM
2023

Tacoma Community Tree Program

Year One Report