

Key Issue #3: Enhancing Collaboration and Communication in the Field: Build on Existing Work and Partnerships

Increasing collaboration in the field, from both allied fields and those in related but currently non-engaged fields, was noted as a significant opportunity and gap. Urban and community forests influence and impact virtually every aspect of community life, from human health and safety to carbon sequestration, air filtration and stormwater management. As a result, there is a very strong need for increased dialogue and collaboration with allied professionals such as landscape architects, city planners, architects, engineers, public works officials, and other design professionals and their professional organizations. Similarly, improving dialogue and collaboration with the community at large is equally important, using networks and groups that include nonprofit organizations, churches, schools, and community groups. Thought leaders noted that collaboration and dialogue are needed both for a host of purposes: raising public awareness; strengthening the cohesiveness of the UCF field; developing a shared agenda for working on UCF challenges and building opportunities together; increasing urban forests on the ground; increasing the capacity for maintenance and care of UCF; and also increasing the demand for and knowledge about UCF across the country. Building on existing work within the field, especially the efforts of the Vibrant Cities Task Force, was discussed by many as both an opportunity and need moving forward. Additionally, interviewees noted that the Vibrant Cities report could serve as a strong base for the future Ten-Year Urban Forestry Action Plan. NUCFAC has done valuable and positive work to advance UCF nationally, and there is an opportunity for an increased role for NUCFAC as a leader in the field in coming decade.

IDEAS FOR ACTION - Gaps, Needs, Opportunities

- Build on existing work within the field, especially the efforts of the Vibrant Cities Task Force. Support more joint, collaborative initiatives and processes like Vibrant Cities, which bring together people from different fields. The Vibrant Cities Report contains key ideas to combat threats from climate change and to build resiliency, but needs sustained funding and support. Preliminary funding estimates to make it a reality range from \$100 to \$300 million.
- Work through existing umbrella organizations, such as the Sustainable Urban Forests Coalition (SUFC), to reach out to member organizations to boldly and effectively communicate the top needs, opportunities and actions for the field and the next Ten-Year Urban Forestry Action Plan. Then follow-up, to align the needs of the UCF community with those of allied professionals.
- Nurture current relationships: it is very important to maintain the existing network of partnerships and agencies that already exist within the USDA Forest Service (USFS) structure.
- Actively connect and network with other professions. Develop opportunities to work as interdisciplinary teams at city, state and federal levels to focus on UCF program development, urban forest installation and maintenance.
- Focus on partnerships and network with related professionals, such as landscape architects, arborists, the health care community, engineers, and mayors. Network and collaborate with all levels of government foresters.
- Foster a shift in educating related professions (e.g. urban planners) from managing pieces of the urban system to managing urban ecosystems.

- Go beyond the “usual suspects” and build bridges with other professions that are doing parallel work, such as public health and medicine, as well as groups working on intersecting issues, such as food justice and environmental justice.
- Creating interdisciplinary teams is both a big opportunity and a challenge, as educational systems do not adequately prepared foresters to effectively work in teams.
- Foster networking among UCF organizations especially at the local level: too often UCF groups are not aware of what others are doing, competing for limited local resources, and feeling like others are “encroaching on their territory.”
- Create opportunities for cross-sector learning between the private and public sectors.
- Create opportunities to learn from and connect with international urban forestry professionals.
- Host UCF conferences that span silos, reach out to broader audiences, and create opportunities for learning from each other.
- Expand awareness of UCF groups and organizations working both locally and nationally, and develop joint opportunities for working collaboratively to maximize UCF resources (instead of competing for resources at the local or federal level). Provide means for each organization to retain their organizational autonomy, effective collaboration and shared funding opportunities.
- Improve communication between the community of practice and lay audiences.
- Build the capacity of USFS staff and traditional foresters to connect with urban core issues.
- Provide training and opportunities for USFS staff to increase their capacity to connect more directly with communities of color, low-income communities, and around urban issues. Forestry has traditionally focused more on rural settings, and there are opportunities to build foresters’ skills and capacity to engage in urban settings. (Related to Key Issue 14 as well.)
- Foster sharing between USFS regions: Create opportunities for USFS regions to share their work with other regions, and encourage adaptation of their work for the broader nation. For example, a training video developed for one region could be equally useful to other regions. (Related to Key Issue 14 as well.)
- Disseminate the next Ten-Year Urban Forestry Action Plan to a broad range of professional organizations, such as the American Planning Association (APA), the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA), the American Public Works Association (APWA), and others for feedback, goal alignment, and to foster collaboration.