



Engaging environmental justice communities in community forest management

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MNSTAC Forum
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Introductions & Background

Warm Up Intention

Defining Environmental Justice

Environmental justice ensures that all people have a right to live in healthy and safe communities and are involved in decision making processes that affect their environment.

This is accomplished through intentional programming, policy change and actions that ensures equity.

Examining the need for environmental justice engagement

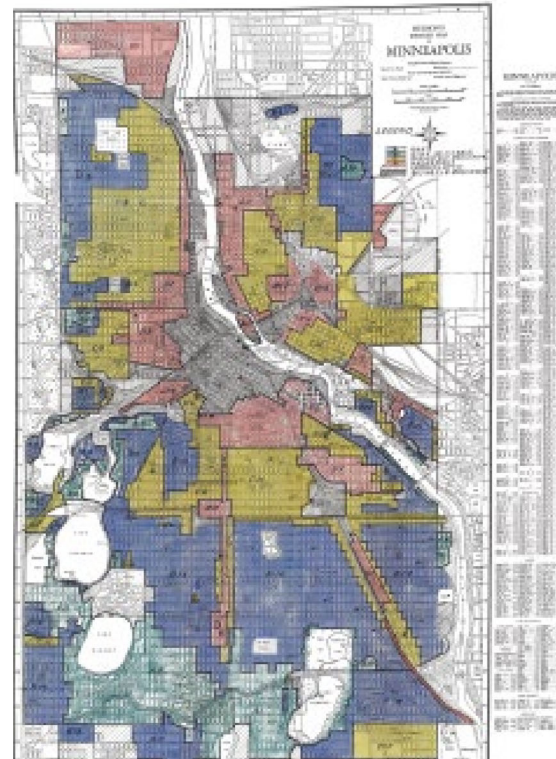
Three considerations to explore before engagement:

1. Background and foundations of injustice.
 - Canopy inequities in formally redlined neighborhoods

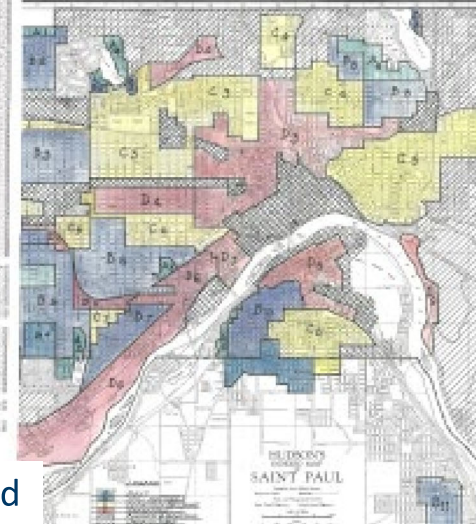
Redlining and the U.S. legacy of systemic injustice

Legacies of redlining include:

- Disproportionate burden of pollution,
- Inequitable access to green space and tree canopy,
- Less space in which to plant
- Disenfranchisement of communities in land-use and engagement by decision making bodies.



Areas by Grade	
Area	Grade
14%	A "Best"
39%	B "Still Desirable"
30%	C "Definitely Declining"
17%	D "Hazardous"



Mapping Injustice: UVA-Richmond

Mapping canopy inequities in the Twin Cities Star Tribune, September 2022



St. Paul's Highland Park neighborhood

Growing Shade – MetCouncil, Tree Trust, The
Nature Conservancy

'You just can't unsee it': The photos above show the disparity in tree coverage between two St. Paul neighborhoods; the lower-income Frogtown is more barren and exposed.



St. Paul's Frogtown neighborhood

Examining the need for environmental justice engagement

2. Recognizing the legacy of underinvestment in UCF.

- Less resilient urban canopies – most urgent rather than resilience-based management.
- No history or capacity for addressing residential concerns, engaging community members other than informing.
- Workforce demands

Shifting from “nice to do” → “need to do”

We know the importance of trees for healthier environments and communities. Growing awareness of the value urban and community forestry canopy is timely but overdue.

- 1972: Congress authorized UCF programs for the USDA-FS in 1972.
- 1978: First federal investment (\$3.5 M annually).
- 1978-1990: No increase in investment (declined to 1.5 M in 1984)
- 1990: Farm Bill fundamentally changed U.S. approach to managing UCF.
- 2000's: Federal investments hovers at \$35 M
- 2010's: Investment increases to \$50M
- **2022: Inflation Reduction Act sees dramatic increase to \$1.5B**



NEWS

Urban Forestry Is Having its Moment

The 2023 Hixon Center Urban Conference provided researchers and practitioners with new tactics to increase tree canopy, access funding, and engage community members as stewards of urban forests.

[Yale School of the Environment, September 2023](#)

How does scarcity show up in addressing environmental justice?

- My department doesn't have capacity to engage communities.
- My staff is overwhelmed with our essential programming (public tree management) and can't take on residential tree support administration or direct programming.
- We send flyers/mailers, but don't manage community concerns or requests through other forms of communications and outreach.
- We recognize language and communication barriers, but don't have people on staff to address them – we need to rely on other departments or partners to bridge them.

***Will this investment be used to address these community concerns? What will be our story? And how can we sustain investments to be able to manage our forests for resiliency into the future?**

Examining the need for environmental justice engagement

3. Awareness/Appreciation of differences in identities and lived experiences.

- Workforce and decision-makers that don't reflect environmental justice communities.
- Need to gain knowledge, empathy, and partnership to effectively deliver services and benefits of this historic investment
- A diversity in identities and lived experiences makes for more robust projects and community investment, demonstrates value and builds allies in advocating for UCF.

How can we acknowledge/address the disparity in representation as we address environmental justice?

- Seek out voices and support to incorporate experiences of environmental injustice into decision making, planning, outreach, and evaluation.
 - Recruit EJ community members for task forces, tree boards, and ambassador outreach.
 - Ask for assistance from community-based organizations, other internal divisions/departments within your city to help you engage EJ communities.
 - Ask your peers how they're engaging communities
- Invest in training and resources to expand your awareness of experiences of injustice and frameworks for engagement.



Urban and Community Forestry in Your Minnesota Community

This survey comes from the Urban and Community Forestry Team at the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. The survey seeks to connect with municipalities across the State to understand community capacity. Gaining an understanding of community needs and resources will allow DNR's UCF Team to better assist Minnesota communities. Your response is greatly appreciated.

Survey Says:

What UCF managers have to say about need for resources and engagement to address canopy inequity in Minnesota

Urban and Community Forestry Survey



Delivered in March 2023



114 responses received from cities and other local units of government, parks districts, state agencies, neighborhood and utility associations.

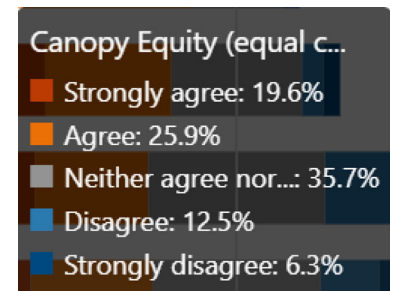
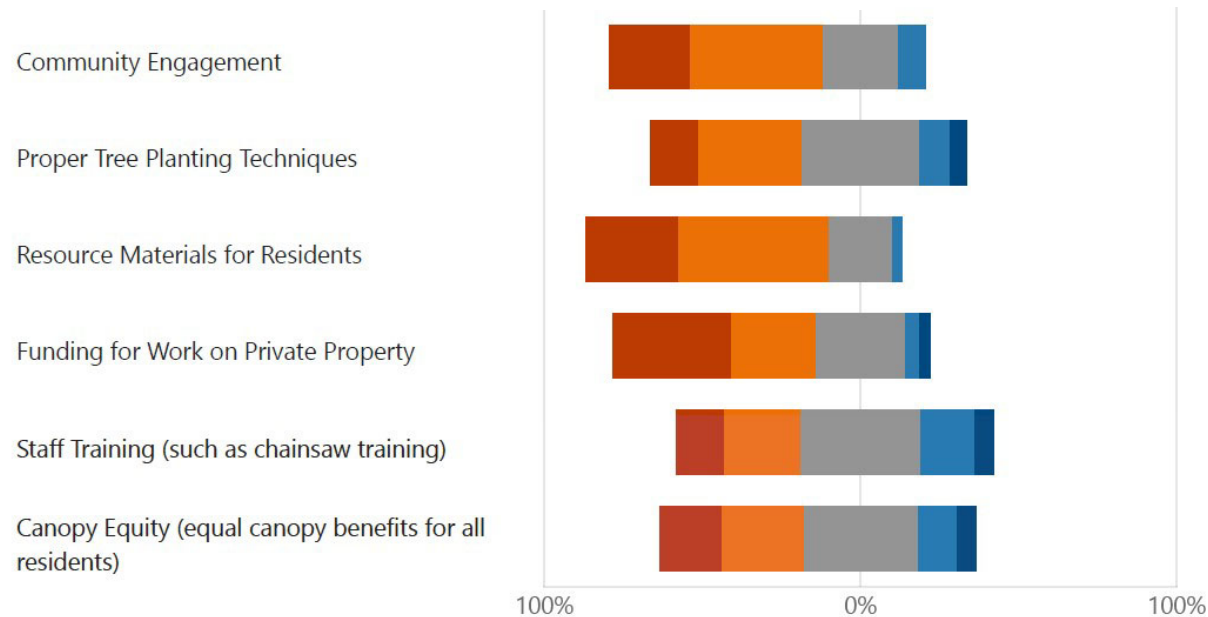


Survey asked practitioners about the responsible for public tree management, wood utilization, ordinances, education, engagement and staff training, as well as canopy equity needs in their community

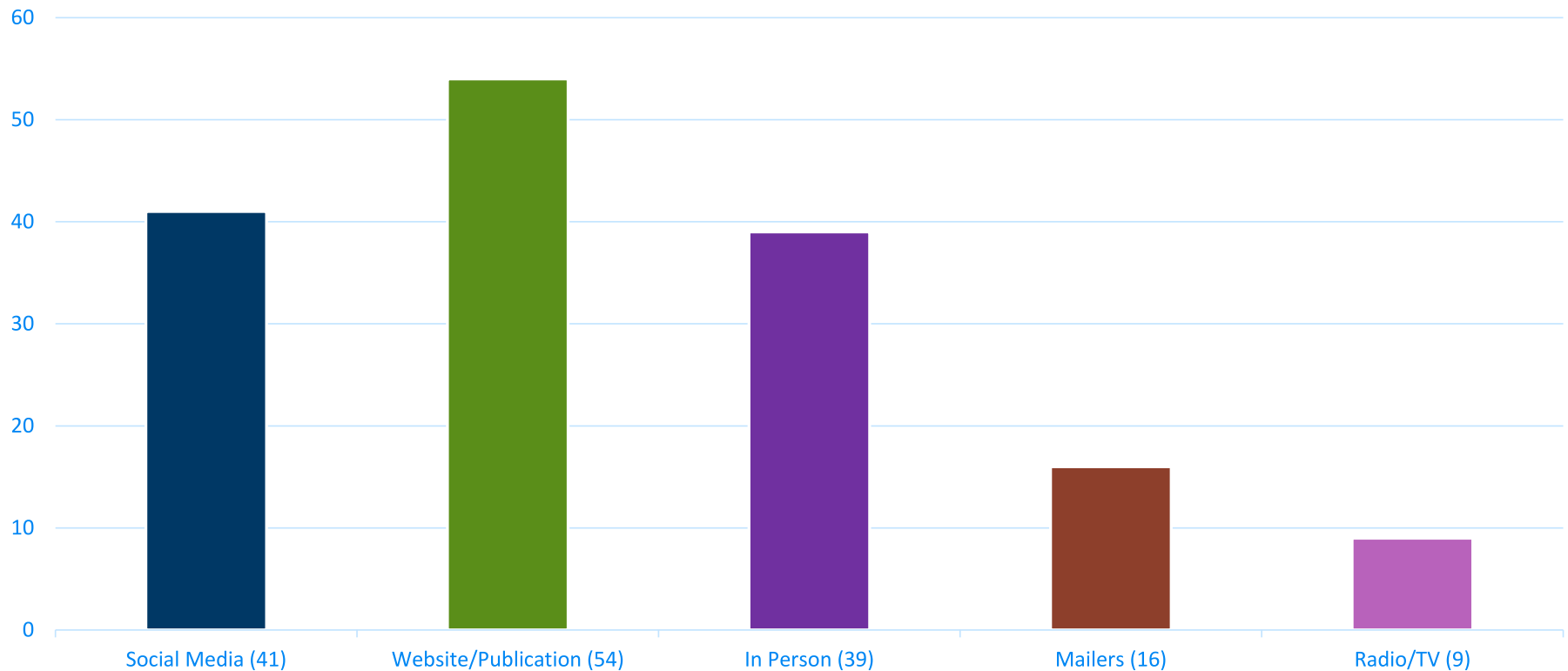
Question 18: My community would like assistance with:

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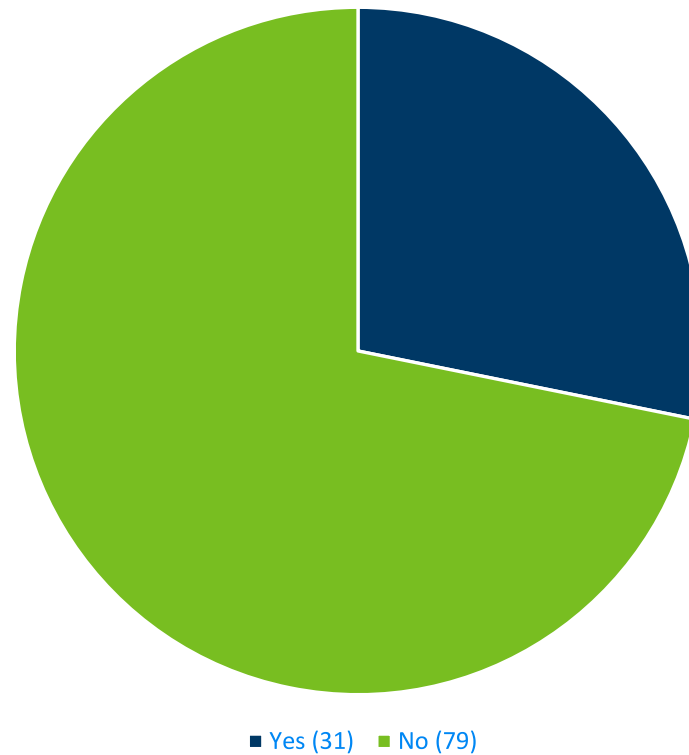
Strongly agree Agree Neither agree nor disagree Disagree Strongly disagree



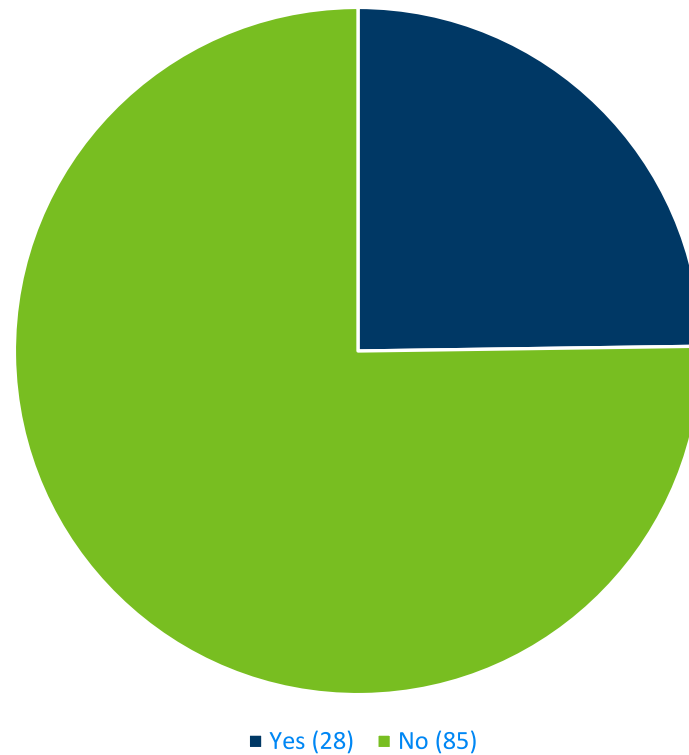
Question 19: How do you engage community members around issues related to public trees?



Question 20: Have you devoted resources to ensure canopy benefits are distributed equally to all residents in your community?



Question 21: Are there community organization/non-profit/institutional partnerships that your community has around tree planting and maintenance duties?





Mini Forest Round Table Discussion – St. Paul

But How?

Tools for strengthening your approach to EJ engagement

#1: Identifying environmental justice communities

Key Interviews from municipal practitioners across the state:

1. You know your communities
2. You may have a good sense of what communities you'd like to connect with.
 - Relying on other organizations and relationships to connect.
3. Some also shared a priority to deliver equality which is different than equity or justice.

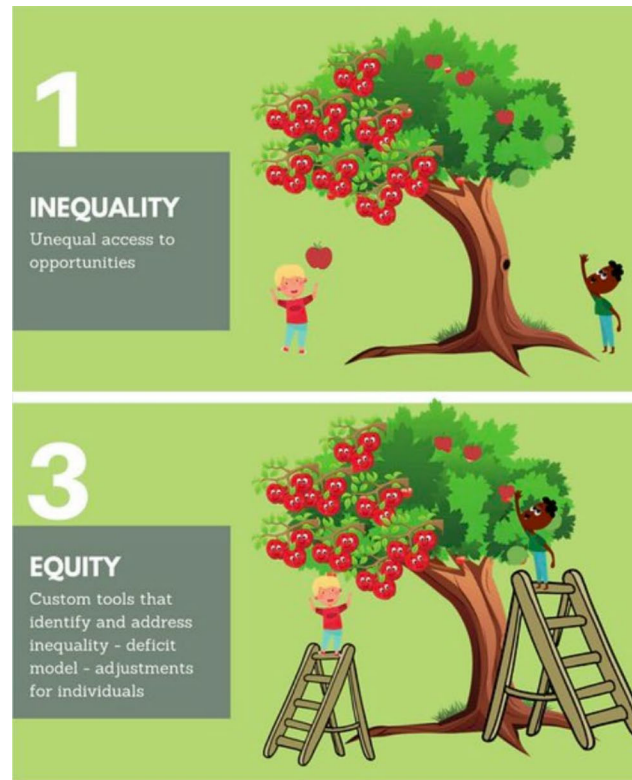
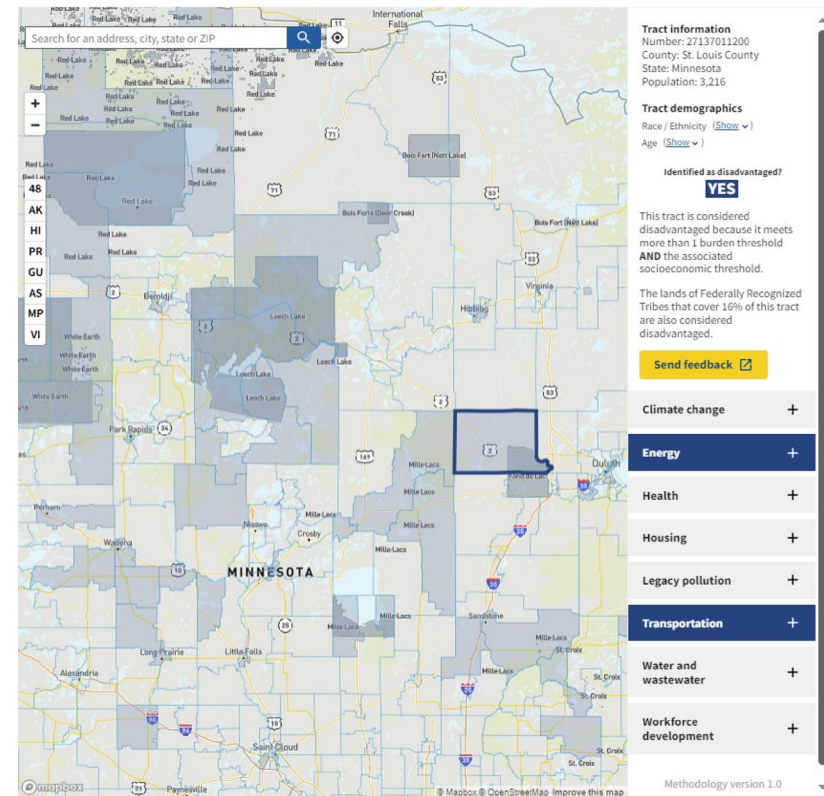


Image source: [Inclusive leadership \(bath.ac.uk\)](http://bath.ac.uk)

#1: Identifying environmental justice communities

- Council on Environmental Quality - [Climate & Economic Justice Screening Tool](#)

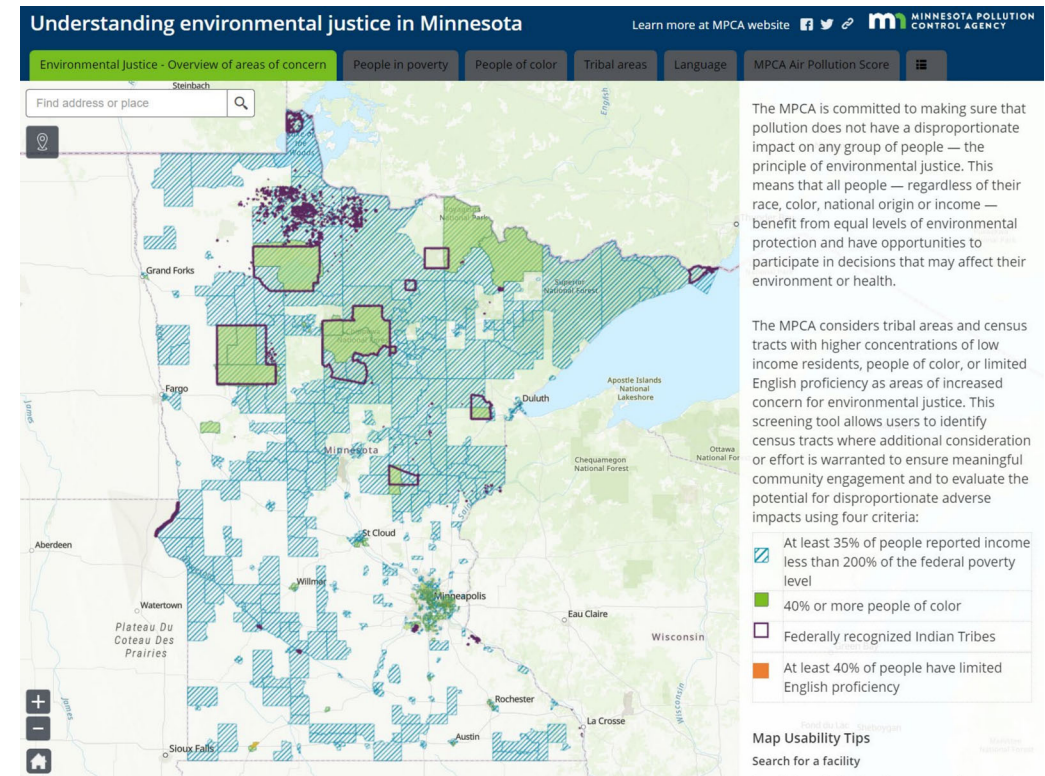
- Climate Change Vulnerability
- Energy Security
- Health
- Housing
- Transportation
- Water/Wastewater
- Workforce Development



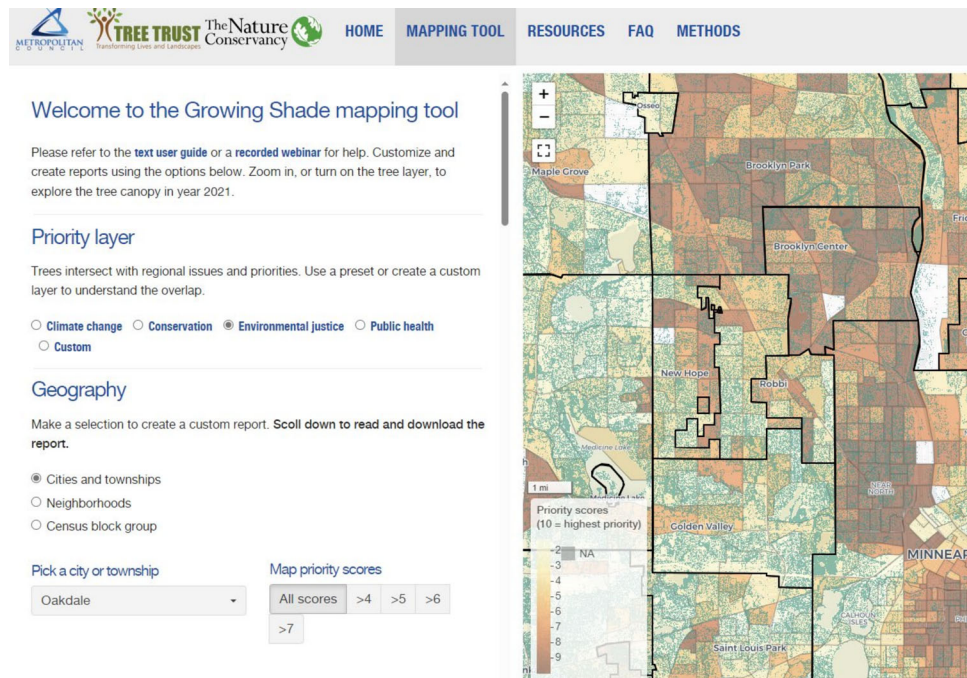
#1: Identifying environmental justice communities

- Minnesota Pollution Control Agency
[Understanding environmental justice in Minnesota \(arcgis.com\)](https://www.mn.gov/arcgis.com)

- People in poverty
- People of color
- Tribal Areas
- Language
- Air Pollution Score
- Neighborhood priority sites



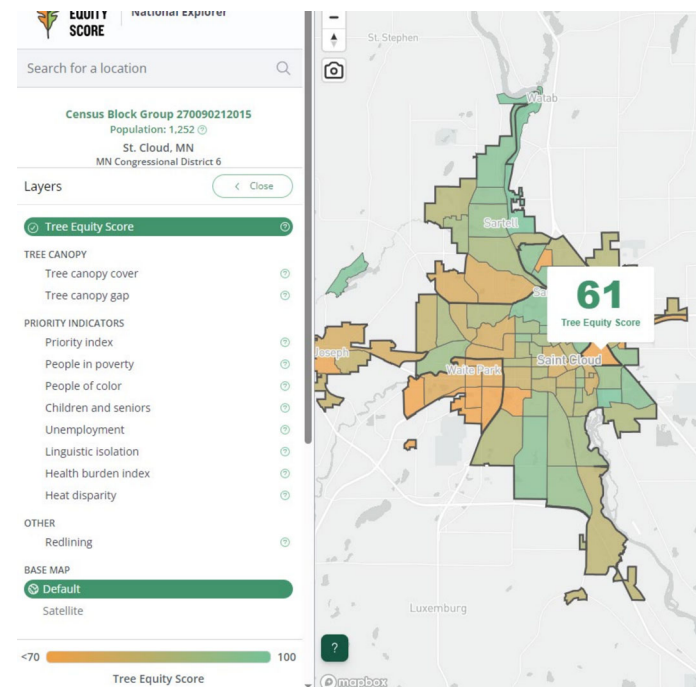
#1a. Identifying canopy inequities in my community



Metro Area

[Growing Shade](#)

11/20/2023



Rural/Greater/Outstate Minnesota

[Tree Equity Score](#)

#2: Understanding EJ community forestry priorities

1. Where to start: Relationships before engagement

- Intentional and relational work takes time, takes energy, brings us farther together
- Ditch the check mark, and embrace authenticity
- Listen to learn, and commit to responding to those lessons

2. How to build relational capacity:

- Adding personnel/reallocating time for existing staff
 - Are opportunities to engage communities and conduct outreach being offered to community members?
 - Temporary vs. long-term hiring

3. Investing in identifying priorities and developing strategies to address together with community: Now engagement begins

#2: Examples of EJ community forestry priorities

1. Tree Planting

- Any extra tree plantings are done in our neighborhoods with the lowest canopy cover.
- Working with CBO's to engage communities in planting projects.

2. Residential/Private Property Tree Care – have not had resources in the past, that is changing *now*

- Education
- Technical support
- Financial Support
- Resource sharing – if you don't conduct direct programming

#3: Determine/Recognize your level of engagement

- What are you hoping to accomplish?
- How can you move your programming across this spectrum?
- Key to success or maintaining positive relationships with new community partners

INCREASING IMPACT ON THE DECISION					
	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.
PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.

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Image source: [International Association of Public Participation](https://www.iap2.org/)



Green Zone Summit - Minneapolis

The next best step:

Building knowledge and skills to conduct EJ engagement

#4: Engagement that centers EJ communities

Peer Recommendations/Observations:

1. Building relationships first

- Demonstrate interest in thinking differently, embracing new perspectives

2. Flexibility in times, formats – be available!

- Distribute Surveys about best times to meet.
- Go to where groups are meeting – pop up events/community gathering
- Coffee Talks

3. Communities of Practice

- Don't need to reinvent the wheel.

4. Rely on existing infrastructure to build new partnerships

- Tree Boards,
- City Resources,
- Neighborhood Associations,
- Businesses

5. Let go of ideals of perfection / fear of failure

#4: Engagement that centers EJ Communities

TRAINING RESOURCE:

Alliance for Community Trees within Arbor Day Foundation/USDA-Forest Service:

- \$129/year to access trainings
- 2 ways to engage: live cohort/video recordings (3 sessions, 4 hours)
- Content:
 - Background on canopy equity, EJ definitions, metrics of success for EJ
 - Skill Development
 - Exercises in defining EJ goals and barriers to engagement



Image pulled from: [Tree Planting Nonprofit | Arbor Day Foundation](#)

Thank You!

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