

# SUFC Operating Principles

January 2018

## SUFC's Mission

We convene and mobilize a network of diverse national organizations to foster thriving communities through healthy urban and community forests.

## SUFC's Value Proposition

The Sustainable Urban Forests Coalition (SUFC) holds the common belief that thriving, vibrant communities grow from healthy natural systems. SUFC serves as a unifying and amplifying voice to speak up for policies, research, education and technologies that promote resilient urban and community forests. SUFC's value lies in leveraging the collective breadth and depth of our members' programs and expanding the network of urban and community forest advocates. Our members each operate unique and successful programs; they serve as the hub for grassroots networks that reach down into communities nationwide. SUFC provides a unified, science-based voice on key urban forestry issues – the catalyst for success now and in the future. SUFC members and partners join or support SUFC for the unique relationship building and collaborative opportunities it creates.

It is our common belief that vibrant, vital communities grow from healthy natural systems. We are continually discovering that urban and community forests are more important than imagined and can play an even greater role improving quality of life and the quality of the environment in our cities and towns in ways not previously understood. Trees and forests provide multiple benefits for people wherever they live. A vast body of evidence affirms that urban and community forests, trees and green space provide multiple benefits– social and economic, as well as environmental– to every neighborhood. These benefits:

- Promote human and community health and well-being
- Sequester carbon
- Conserve energy
- Help manage stormwater and run-off, and assure clean water
- Improve air quality
- Boost the economic health of communities by increasing property values, and improving business settings
- Create employment in local economies
- Foster neighborhood cohesion and solidarity, reduce crime and create safe spaces for neighbors to interact
- Make streets safer and communities more walkable
- Promote and nurture biodiversity in both built and natural ecosystems

At the same time, urban and community forests face unprecedented threats from invasive pests and are stressed by weather extremes and changing environmental conditions associated with a changing climate.

We affirm the following fundamental and operating principles as a guide to our joint and collective policy, public education and outreach efforts.

- 1) Ecologically urban, community and rural forests are interconnected; and cross ownership boundaries. Good public policy recognizes management and stewardship decisions have impacts across the landscape and at multiple scales. Pests, disease and invasives can spread easily from city to suburb to village to open forests. Rural and urban forests play vital, indivisible roles in delivering clean water to all communities; they provide fiscally-sound green solutions to stormwater management.
- 2) Science-based research is fundamental to decision-making and the development of best practices for professionals, communities and private citizens. Research into the benefits of urban forests and the threats they face is more important than ever before. Research that allows for adaptive science and bridges the gap to implementation is especially needed by public managers, private industry, and individuals alike seeking to expand and protect their urban forest resources and improve quality of life in their communities.
- 3) Science delivery mechanisms are necessary to inform and promote adoption of evidence-based practices. We recognize the complex environmental, economic and social factors that are involved in an adaptive and applied (delivery) process for urban and community forestry research and development. To that end, we encourage and support an inclusive process for the multiple disciplines that intersect with urban and community forestry including arboriculture, ecology, ecosystem services, human health, governance/civic engagement, and the interaction between people and natural systems.
- 4) National policies should build local capacity and maximize the ability of local communities and partners to create healthy and sustainable environments that includes long-term management of their forests, trees, and green space.
- 5) Investment and coordination of local state and federal programs amplifies urban and community forestry benefits and leverages efforts. Since the 1990 Farm Bill that codified the UCF program, the US Forest Service and state forestry agencies and their key cooperators have provided – and continue to provide – fundamental research, critical resources, and a delivery system that addresses urban and community forestry. Coordination can:
  - reduce the potential for overlap and duplication;
  - multiply the impact of federal investments;
  - simplify planning and project implementation for local governments and community partners; and
  - build on the successes and synergies of a successful program and delivery system.
- 6) Collaborative engagement of all relevant community partners and federal and state agencies increases success.
- 7) Effective “green’ planning is framed by ecological boundaries, not ownership and jurisdictional boundaries. The process includes human dimensions and impacts (community engagement and cohesiveness) as well as physical and biological aspects. Federal, state and local programs

addressing cross-jurisdictional and cross-discipline issues should incorporate an ‘all ownership’ and landscape level approach.

- 8) Urban and community forestry projects are a long- term investment with differing requirements throughout their life-cycle. They may be ongoing citizen engagement as well as physical and biological monitoring, maintenance and care.
- 9) Coalitions are effective because members commit to listening, collaborative learning, and adaptation.
- 10) We believe that every citizen be allowed fair treatment and meaningful involvement in environmental decision-making and deserve an opportunity to be healthy and thrive in their community.

### **SUFC Coalition Operating Values**

- i. Coalition members agree on the fundamental principles and operating values of SUFC.
- ii. Coalition members have diverse perspectives and often hold different views on specific issues.
- iii. Discussion and consensus among a broad cross-section of organizations can promote a more positive policy climate for green infrastructure/urban and community forestry.
- iv. Joint action can deliver better results for all of us rather than independent, uncoordinated advocacy by each of us.
- v. A successful coalition builds over time, as members develop trust and habits of cooperation.
- vi. Transparency is important to effective coalition operations.
- vii. Positions will be based on sound science and subject to technical review. Positions will be explicitly connected to urgent national priorities (e.g. job creation.)
- viii. The coalition may take positions on standards for professional practice, certification systems, building and engineering codes and specifications, or other areas that support vibrant, vital communities and healthy natural systems.
- ix. Coalitions and their members understand the value of collaborative learning and action.
- x. Participation in the Coalition does not necessarily imply agreement with specific policy proposals that might flow from the Coalition – only a willingness to participate formally in the discussion.

### **Structure**

The actions and deliberations of the Coalition, including the Steering Committee, will be transparent to all members.

### SUFC Member organization

Membership is open to national membership-based or non-profit organizations working on the national level to advance a unified urban and community forest agenda for our nation's communities. Member must be willing to sign a letter endorsing SUFC and its principles and abide by SUFC governance guidelines. Member organizations in good standing have a vote.

Each SUFC member organization should identify a designated representative, with alternates or additional representatives as needed. All members must provide formal acknowledgement of the principles of collaboration, affirming that their organization endorses participation. Coalition members commit to meeting such times as may be necessary to continue to expand the coalition's policy platform or other timely issues.

### Ex Officio members

"Ex officio" is Latin for "from the office," to describe someone who has a right because of an office held. The Coalition may have ex officio members who provide input and ideas and participate in the Coalition committees and activities because of their position or employer, but who do not vote. A national organization that meets SUFC criteria may request ex officio status if they perceive a potential conflict as a voting member or otherwise feel that it is inappropriate for them to be a full member of the Coalition. Ex officio organizations are non-voting members.

### Affiliate organizations

Local, state, and regional organizations with a demonstrated focus on urban and community forests can become SUFC Affiliates. Affiliates receive periodic communications from the Coalition, provide input through conference calls and other venues, and participate in SUFC campaigns to advance urban forests. Affiliate organizations are non-voting members.

### Strategic Partners

Strategic Partners are financial supporters of the Coalition. These organizations often work closely with SUFC members and may serve on committees or working groups. Strategic Partners are non-voting members.

### Coalition Advisor

An advisor to the Sustainable Urban Forests Coalition is an unofficial but honorary role designed to support the SUFC Steering Committee and SUFC leadership. Beyond their passion for healthy, vital communities, Advisors have a wide and deep experience and insight into urban and community forestry and related issues, and are willing to share their expertise and council with SUFC leadership. Depending on the needs of the Steering Committee, SUFC may have one or several advisors at any given time. Advisors are non-voting members.

### SUFC Steering Committee

The SUFC Steering Committee (SC) is the leadership body principally responsible for fulfilling the Coalition's purpose and is accountable for the Coalition's overall operations and sustainability. The Steering Committee will be comprised of the Steering Committee Chair (or Co-Chairs), Working Group Chairs (and Co-Chairs) and no more than 10 additional member representatives. No organization shall have more than one vote on Steering Committee.

Steering Committee members serve a 2-year term with the possibility of 3 consecutive terms.

Election of a slate of Steering Committee members and recommended Chair will be submitted annually to the membership by the current Chair(s). The slate passes with a simple majority of members in good standing. If the slate does not pass, the existing Steering Committee will continue until a new slate is approved.

### SUFC Chair

The Chair (or Co-Chairs) acts as the official spokesperson of the SUFC and provides strategic leadership to the Coalition as a whole. The Chair is a member of the Steering Committee and other ad hoc committees or working groups as available. The Chair works closely with the Convener and oversees this contractual position with support from the Steering Committee and the fiscal grant manager.

The Chair serves a 2-year term with the possibility of 3 consecutive terms. The chair is nominated/recommended by the Steering Committee and approved by the membership.

### Convener

The Convener (or Convener organization) is the key point of contact for the Coalition and acts as the Coalition's administrator. The Convener facilitates structured and informal communications among SUFC partners; tracks and coordinates SUFC decisions and resulting plans; oversees all formal SUFC external communications, supports outreach efforts, liaison and advisor to the Steering Committee, oversees subcontractors with fiscal agent on behalf of SUFC, and acts as central project coordinator and manager for the SUFC. The Convener position has been a contractual arrangement since the inception of the SUFC.

If the Convener is not able to fulfill grant services/obligations, the Steering Committee will step in to fill the void for an interim period until a new Convener is identified or an alternative solution is proposed. The Convener works collaboratively with the Steering Committee and reports directly to the Steering Committee chair or co-chairs.

The Steering Committee is responsible for the process to select a Convener. The process should be clearly articulated to the SUFC membership and should conform to the applicable OMB regulations.

## Working Groups

Working Groups are the primary mechanism by which SUFC work is accomplished. Each working group has a Chair (or Co-Chairs) that leads the group and documents their work (members, activities, etc.) The Chair interacts with the Convener and the Steering Committee to assure that working group activities are endorsed by the Steering Committee and advance the SUFC strategic plan. Each working group determines its own operating process (i.e. role, membership and decision-making process) and relay this information to the SUFC Convener and Steering Committee. Working Group Chairs (and co-chairs) serve a 2-year term with the possibility of 3 consecutive terms.

## Fiscal Agent and Grant Manager

The Fiscal Agent and Grant Manager will oversee all fiscal matters including contracts and grants. They will, within the framework of their organization's operating procedures, comply with all applicable federal laws, rules and regulations. They will work with the Convener and SUFC Chair/s to provide regular reports to the Steering Committee and an annual report out to the SUFC membership.

## **Decision Making**

SUFC will use 'opt out' voting. SUFC endorsement requires approval of  $\frac{3}{4}$  vote of non-abstaining members. Members that wish to abstain from the vote must clearly indicate as such. The position will include a list of supporting organizations. All members will be listed unless they request their organization's name be removed from the SUFC list of signatories.

## **Communication**

SUFC will strive to operate by consensus of the members whenever taking a public position. When necessary, the coalition may use facilitated consensus dialogues to develop consensus recommendations.

The SUFC Chair and Convener will be the primary spokespeople on SUFC's behalf. Whenever possible the Chair and Convener will direct inquiries to the appropriate SUFC member.

Public communications based on approved positions and policies will be managed by the Chair and/or Convener.

Public communication that is not based on approved positions and policies should be submitted to the Steering Committee for review and a determination of how it should be handled.

# Appendix A

## Membership Responsibilities

1. Membership
  - a. Membership is open to national membership-based or non-profit organizations working on the national level to advance a unified urban and community forest agenda for our nation's communities.
  - b. SUFC member organizations endorse the SUFC Operating Principles (this document.)
  - c. Each member organization will identify a designated representative (liaison) for purposes of voting on SUFC positions. Member organizations may identify an alternate as well as additional representatives to work on SUFC activities. Each member organization will receive one vote regardless of the number of representatives engaged in SUFC business.
  
2. Dues and Procedures
  - a. All current SUFC members are required to have a signed letter acknowledging their membership and endorsement of the SUFC Operating Principles on file with SUFC.
  - b. To be an active voting member, new member organizations must endorse the SUFC Operating Principles prior to participating in SUFC activities. No vote will be recorded for new members until the Principles are signed and received by the Convener.
  - c. The letter endorsing the SUFC principles is signed once upon joining the coalition. It should be resubmitted if and when the principles are amended by the membership.
  - d. Membership requires payment of annual dues by the end of February.<sup>1</sup> A notification structure for dues will be provided to members.
  - e. Membership dues provide funding for a wide range of SUFC expenses that are not allowable under the restricted USDA Forest Service grant or other grants.
  
3. Membership Engagement Expectations
  - a. At least one SUFC member liaison is expected to attend the Coalition Annual Meeting (usually held in Washington, DC).
  - b. Member organizations should actively engage in the business of the Coalition through participation in one or more committees (ad hoc or standing) or working groups, bringing the portfolio expertise to work of the Coalition. Member organizations may choose to have more than one representative to serve on multiple committee/working groups.
  - c. Members should relay the business and work of the Coalition to their organizational membership and relay the interests of their constituency back to the Coalition.
  - d. Members should respond to membership reporting requirements (i.e., reporting matching grant hours on a quarterly basis) as requested.
  
4. Membership Termination
  - a. Failure to have a signed letter on file acknowledging their membership and endorsement of the SUFC Operating Principles.

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<sup>1</sup> If a potential or current member is unable to pay the annual dues and would like to stay an active member of the SUFC, an alternative payment/arrangement may be negotiated with the Convener and approved by the Chair.

- b. Failure to pay annual dues or make an alternative arrangement as outlined above.
- c. The process for terminating a member organization will include a determination by the Chair, in consultation with the Steering Committee. Any member organization (or pending member organization) that is not in good standing (failing to meet the Membership Responsibilities outlined above) will be notified. After written notification, the organization will be given 60 calendars days to comply before final termination by the SUFC Steering Committee.
- d. Members may voluntarily withdraw from SUFC at any time by sending a letter to the Chair outlining the withdrawal and effective date.