

# **Sustainable Urban Forests Coalition Operating Principles**

July 2019

## **SUFC's Mission**

Sustainable Urban Forests Coalition (SUFC) convenes and mobilizes a network of diverse national organizations to foster thriving communities through healthy urban and community forests.

## **SUFC's Value Proposition**

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 to unify and amplify support for policies, research, education and technologies that promote resilient urban and community forests. Our members each operate unique and successful programs and 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.

Vibrant, vital communities depend on healthy natural systems to flourish. We are continually discovering new ways that urban and community forests improve the quality of life and the quality of the environment in our cities and towns. A vast body of evidence affirms that urban and community forests, trees and greenspace provide multiple benefits – social and economic, as well as environmental – to every neighborhood.

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SUFC Members understand the benefits of healthy urban forests include:

- Promoting human and community health and well-being;
- Sequestering carbon;
- Conserving energy;
- Helping with stormwater management and run-off, and ensuring clean water;
- Improving air quality;
- Boosting the economic health of communities by increasing property values, and improving business settings;
- Creating employment opportunities in local economies;
- Fostering neighborhood cohesion and solidarity, reducing crime and creating safe spaces for neighbors to interact;
- Making streets safer and communities more walkable; and
- Promoting and nurturing biodiversity in both built and natural ecosystems.

At the same time, urban and community forests face unprecedented threats from invasive pests, weather extremes, changing environmental conditions, and growing competition for high value land, which reinforces the need for continued public and private investment.

### **SUFC Coalition Operating Values**

Coalition members agree on the fundamental principles and operating values of SUFC:

- 1) Coalition members have diverse perspectives and often hold different views on specific issues.
- 2) Discussion and consensus among a broad cross-section of organizations can promote a more positive policy climate for urban and community forestry.
- 3) Joint action can deliver better results for all of us rather than independent, uncoordinated advocacy by each of us.
- 4) A successful coalition builds over time, as members develop trust and habits of cooperation.
- 5) Transparency is important to effective coalition operations.
- 6) 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.)
- 7) Coalitions and their members understand the value of collaborative learning and action.
- 8) Participation in the Coalition does not imply agreement with specific policy proposals that might flow from the Coalition.
- 9) Decisions of SUFC National Chairs or Co-Chairs and Steering Committee with respect to structure, operations and public positions will be transparent to all members.

### **SUFC's Guiding Principles**

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

- 1) Members commit to listening, collaborative learning, and adaptation.
- 2) Collaborative engagement of all relevant community partners and federal and state agencies increases success.

- 3) Every citizen deserves fair treatment and meaningful involvement in environmental decision-making and an opportunity to be healthy and thrive in their community.
- 4) Urban and community forestry projects are a long- term investment with differing requirements throughout their life-cycle and will often require ongoing citizen engagement as well as physical and biological monitoring, maintenance, and care.
- 5) Supporting sustainable urban forests requires an inclusive approach to communication, outreach, and research across 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.
- 6) Science-based research is fundamental to sound 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 for public managers, private industry, and individuals seeking to expand and protect their urban forest resources and improve the quality of life in their communities.
- 7) Ecologically urban, community and rural forests are interconnected and effective “green” planning is framed by ecological boundaries, not ownership and jurisdictional 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. Federal, state, and local programs addressing cross-jurisdictional and cross-discipline issues should incorporate an “all ownership” and landscape level approach.
- 8) National policies should build local capacity and maximize the ability of local communities and partners to create healthy and sustainable environments that include long-term management of their forests, trees, and greenspace. 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.

## **SUFC Members, Advisers, Affiliates and Partners**

### Member

Voting membership in SUFC is open to national membership-based or non-profit organizations working to advance a unified urban and community forest agenda for our nation's communities. Each member organization in good standing may cast a vote on decisions that require Member input or have otherwise been to a vote by the Steering Committee or SUFC National Chair or Co-Chairs.

### SUFC Advisors

The Coalition may have voluntary advisers, who provide input and ideas and participate in Coalition committees and activities because of their position or employer. Advisers are non-voting members, but may serve on Working Groups and support the Steering Committee as needed. Advisers serve 2 year terms and renewals subject to steering committee approval.

### 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, but may serve Working Groups and the Steering Committee.

### Strategic Partners

Strategic Partners are financial supporters of the Coalition. These organizations often work closely with SUFC members. Strategic Partners are non-voting members, but may serve Working Groups and the Steering Committee.

### Responsibilities

1. Each member, adviser, affiliate and partner must endorse the SUFC Operating Principles.
2. Each member, adviser, affiliate and partner will identify a designated representative (liaison) for purposes of participating in SUFC and if they are a voting member to vote on SUFC positions. 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.

3. Members and Strategic Partners are required to pay annual dues by the end of February.<sup>1</sup> A notification structure for dues will be provided to Members and Partners.
4. Membership Engagement Expectations
  - a. A liaison from each member, adviser, affiliate and partner is expected to attend the Coalition Annual Meeting (usually held in Washington, DC).
  - b. Member, adviser, affiliate and partner organizations are also encouraged to engage in the business of the Coalition through participation in one or more committees (ad hoc or standing) or working groups. Organizations may choose to have more than one representative serve on multiple committees/working groups.
  - c. Each member, adviser, affiliate and partner 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. Each member, adviser, affiliate and partner should respond to membership reporting requirements as requested.

#### Membership Approval and Termination

1. The Steering Committee will approve any request to join SUFC as Member, Voluntary Advisor, Affiliate Organization or Strategic Partner.
2. Steering Committee may terminate a Member, Voluntary Advisor, Affiliate Organization or Strategic Partner for:
  - a. Refusal to abide by the SUFC Operating Principles;
  - b. Failure to abide by Membership Responsibilities outlined above, including failure to meet engagement expectation or failure of a Member or Strategic Partner to pay annual dues or make an alternative arrangement as outlined above; or
  - c. Engaging in harassing, abusive or otherwise inappropriate behavior while participating in SUFC businesses or event.
3. The process for terminating relationships with Members, Voluntary Advisors, Affiliates Organizations or Strategic Partners will include a determination by the SUFC National Chair or Co-Chairs, in consultation with the Steering Committee. Any organization that is not in good standing (failing to meet the Responsibilities outlined above) will be

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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 SUFC National Chair or Co-Chairs.

notified. After written notification, the organization will be given 60 calendar days to comply before final termination by the SUFC Steering Committee.

4. Members, Voluntary Advisors, Affiliate Organizations or Strategic Partners may voluntarily withdraw from SUFC at any time by sending a letter to the SUFC National Chair or Co-Chairs outlining the withdrawal and effective date.

## **SUFC Governance**

### SUFC Steering Committee

The SUFC Steering Committee 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 SUFC National Chair (or Co-Chairs), Working Group Chairs (and Co-Chairs) and no more than 10 additional member representatives with a preference for those organizations who identify urban and community forestry as a priority. No organization shall have more than one vote on the Steering Committee and no more than 2 people from any one organization shall attend a Steering Committee meeting without authorization from the SUFC National Chair or Co-Chairs.

Working groups provide advice to the Steering Committee on SUFC objectives consistent with member-approved mission and goals. The Steering Committee sets these objectives, which are implemented by the Convenor with oversight from the SUFC National Chair or Co-chairs.

Steering Committee members serve a 2-year term.

Any SUFC member organization may serve on the Steering Committee. Two months prior to elections, SUFC National Chairs will request nominations for the Steering Committee from the SUFC Members (voting and nonvoting). Nominees must confirm to the SUFC National Chairs that they are willing and able to participate in Steering Committee calls and meetings before being placed on the ballot. Slots will be filled by those candidates with the most votes cast by Members entitled to vote. Unexpected vacancies may be filled by email voting.

### Working Groups

Working Groups provide the Steering Committee with suggestions and advice on SUFC objectives, which are later implemented by the Convenor (if appropriate). Each working group has a Chair or Co-Chairs appointed by the Steering Committee. The Working Chair (or co-chairs) interacts with the Convenor and the Steering Committee to assure that working group's focus aligns with the Steering Committee's vision and advances the SUFC mission and goals. Working Group Chairs (and co-chairs) are appointed by the Steering Committee to serve a 2-year term with the possibility of 3 consecutive terms. One of the Working Group chairs must be a member of the Steering Committee.

### SUFC National Chair

The SUFC National Chair (or Co-Chairs) oversees the Convener's day-to-day implementation of the objections set by the Steering Committee. The Chair serves a 2-year term with the possibility of 3 consecutive terms. The SUFC National Chairs or Co-Chairs are recommended by the Steering Committee and approved by a simple majority of voting members.

### Convener

The Convener (or Convener organization) manages the day-to-day operations of the Coalition, serves as the key point of contact for the Coalition to members and the public and is responsible for implementing tasks and overall operations of the Coalition as set by the Steering Committee with oversight from the SUFC National Chairs and Co-Chairs. 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. Due to SUFC's federal funding, the process for selecting a Convener must conform to the applicable Office of Management and Budget regulations and be clearly articulated to the SUFC membership.

### 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 National Chair or Co-Chairs to provide regular reports to the Steering Committee and an annual report out to the SUFC membership. A Memo of Understanding is to be signed between the two parties. The fiscal agent may require a fee for service.

### **Decision Making (Relates to Policy/Position Statements)**

SUFC will use "opt out" voting. SUFC endorsement requires approval of three-quarters 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 National Chair(s) and Convener will be the primary spokespeople on SUFC's behalf. Whenever possible the Chair(s) and Convener will direct inquiries to the appropriate SUFC member.

Public communications based on approved positions and policies will be managed by the Chair(s) 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.