

Sustainable Urban Forests Coalition

Operating Principles

January 2024

The Sustainable Urban Forests Coalition (SUFC) is the nation’s only urban forestry advocacy group. We strive to amplify our members’ voices, promote sound science and practice in the field, advocate for effective policies, and facilitate dialogue among members and within the broader field.

SUFC’s Guiding Principles

SUFC Members understand the benefits of healthy urban forests include:

- Promoting human and community health and well-being;
- Combating climate change;
- Mitigating urban heat islands;
- 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.

We also understand the following statements are fundamental to supporting urban forests throughout the US:

- Science-based research is fundamental to sound decision-making and the development of best practices for professionals, communities, and private citizens;
- Members believe in the mantra of “right tree, right place” and the importance of long-term maintenance;
- 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;

- 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; and
- Urban and community forestry projects are long-term investments with differing requirements throughout their life cycle and will often require ongoing citizen engagement as well as physical and biological monitoring, maintenance, and care.

SUFC Members and Strategic Partners

Member

Voting membership in SUFC is open to non-profit, local, state, federal, national, and regional organizations with a demonstrated focus on urban and community forests, or the associated benefits of urban and community forests, 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 put to a vote by the Steering Committee or SUFC Chair/Vice-Chair.

Virtual and Introductory Members

Non-profit, local, state, federal, national, and regional¹ organizations with a demonstrated focus on urban and community forests, or the associated benefits of urban and community forests, can become SUFC virtual and Introductory members. These members receive periodic communications from the Coalition, provide input through conference calls and other venues, and participate in SUFC campaigns to advance urban forests or their associated benefits. Virtual and Introductory members are non-voting members, but may also attend and participate in SUFC special events and meetings.

Strategic Partners

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

Responsibilities

1. Each member and strategic partner will identify a designated representative (liaison) for purposes of participating in SUFC. If their organization is eligible to vote, they may do so on SUFC positions. Organizations may identify an alternate as well as additional

¹ Regional, state, municipal and/or community based organizations.

representatives to work on SUFC activities. Each member organization will receive one vote regardless of the number of representatives engaged in SUFC business.

2. Members and strategic partners are required to pay annual dues.² A notification structure for dues will be provided to members and strategic partners.

Membership Engagement Expectations

1. A liaison from each member and strategic partner is encouraged to attend the Coalition Annual Meeting (usually held in Washington, DC).
2. Members and strategic 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.
3. Each member and strategic 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.
4. Each member and strategic 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 a member or strategic partner.
2. The Steering Committee may terminate a member or strategic partner for:
 - a. Failure to abide by Membership Responsibilities outlined above, including failure to meet engagement expectations or failure of a member or strategic partner to pay annual dues or make an alternative arrangement as outlined above; or

² 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, or Chair and Vice Chair). Introductory members pay no dues.

- b. Engaging in harassing, abusive, or otherwise inappropriate behavior while participating in SUFC business or events.
3. The process for terminating relationships with a member or strategic partner will include a determination by the SUFC Chair/Vice-Chair, in consultation with the Steering Committee. Any organization that is not in good standing (failing to meet the Responsibilities outlined above) will be notified. After written notification, the organization will be given 60 calendar days to comply before final termination by the SUFC Steering Committee.
1. Members and strategic partners may voluntarily withdraw from SUFC at any time by sending a letter to the SUFC Chair/Vice-Chair outlining the withdrawal and effective date.

SUFC Governance

SUFC Steering Committee

The Steering Committee (SC) is composed of regular members (Virtual and Introductory members excluded) and Strategic Partners, principally responsible for fulfilling the Coalition’s Mission and is accountable for the Coalition’s overall operations and sustainability. The Steering Committee will be composed of the SUFC Chair, Vice-Chair, and Working Group Chairs. The SC will be composed of no fewer than 12 people, no more than 16. The ratio of national to regional members of the SC should reflect the ratio of the Coalition membership as a whole.

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 Chair/Vice-Chair.

Working groups provide advice to the Steering Committee on SUFC objectives consistent with a member-approved mission and goals. The Steering Committee sets these objectives, which are implemented by the Convener with oversight from the SUFC Chair/Vice-Chair.

Steering Committee members (see [job description](#) for additional information) serve a 2-year term, with a maximum of (3) two-year terms (total of 6 years). All SC members will be expected to fulfill the responsibilities outlined below. At least eight members of the SC (**which can be one of the five dedicated seats, national, or regional representatives**) will have specific roles, those roles being:

- a. Chair/Vice Chair
- b. Work Group co-chairs
 - i. Policy (2),
 - ii. Strategic Engagement and Networking (2), and

iii. Research (2)

Nominations and Election Process

Elections will be held November-December each year. Two months prior to elections, the SUFC Vice-Chair, in coordination with the SUFC Convener, will request nominations for the Steering Committee and standing Vice-Chair from the SUFC regular members. Nominees must confirm to the SUFC Vice-Chair, in coordination with the Convener, that they are willing and able to participate in Steering Committee calls and meetings, and commit to 2-years of service on the SC or as Vice-Chair, then Chair, before being placed on the ballot. Slots will be filled by those candidates with the most votes cast by regular members entitled to vote. The elected positions will begin in January, following the calendar year. Unexpected vacancies may be filled by email voting.

Prior to the nominations and elections process, the SUFC Chair/Vice-Chair and Convener will calculate the ratio of national to regional members and ensure the number of SC seats reflects that ratio. For instance, as of March 2023, five (5) of 40 members are regional which is 12.5% of the total membership. Accordingly, 12.5% of the entire steering committee (total of 12) would mean two regional members (rounding up from 1.5). If the ratio changes prior to the next election cycle, the ratio of national to regional organizations must also change to reflect the shift in membership.

Ex-Officio SC Members

Definition: Ex-Officio members are those who have served three consecutive terms on the SC, government representatives, and immediate past Chair. Ex-Officio members are permitted to join meetings, but do not officially hold one of the 'dedicated' positions on the SC (e.g., one of five named national organizations) and also do not have a vote.

Working Groups

Working Groups provide the Steering Committee with suggestions and advice on SUFC objectives, which are later implemented by the Convener (if appropriate). Each working group has a Chair (or Co-Chairs) appointed by the Steering Committee. The [Working Group Chair](#) (or Co-Chairs) interacts with the Convener and the Steering Committee to ensure each 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. The Working Group chairs must be a member of the Steering Committee.

SUFC Chair/Vice Chair

The SUFC Chair/Vice Chair oversees the Convener's day-to-day implementation of the tasks set by the Steering Committee. The Chair serves a 1-year term with the possibility of 2 consecutive terms. The SUFC Chairs/Vice-Chair are recommended by the Steering Committee and approved by a simple majority of voting members. SUFC Chair/Vice-Chair must be affiliated with a dues-paying member of SUFC.

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 Chair/Vice-Chair. 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, acts as a strategic partner to the Steering Committee, oversees subcontractors with fiscal agent on behalf of SUFC, and acts as central project coordinator, and manager, including grants management/deliverables, and membership recruitment, retainment, and dues collections 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 SUFC Chair/Vice-Chair.

The Steering Committee is responsible for the process of selecting 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

The Fiscal Agent will assist with all fiscal matters including contracts and grants management. 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/Vice-Chair to provide regular reports to the Steering Committee and an annual report 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.

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/Vice-Chair and Convener will be the primary spokespeople on SUFC's behalf. Whenever possible the Chair/Vice-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/Vice-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.