

2024

Tacoma Community Tree Program

Year Two Report



CITY OF
Tacoma



Tacoma Tree
Foundation

REPORT PREPARED BY THE TACOMA TREE FOUNDATION IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE CITY
OF TACOMA'S URBAN FORESTRY PROGRAM.

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Community Tree Program Overview

Program Summary, Purpose, and Critical Components

In an effort to improve equitable, community-focused urban forestry outcomes, City Council passed ongoing funding for a Community Tree Program in 2022. Following the budget adoption, the City of Tacoma solicited proposals for a partnership program between the City's Urban Forestry Program (CoT Urban Forestry) and a local nonprofit. The goal of this Program is to enhance community engagement, provide education, and support the growth and stewardship of Tacoma's urban forest by reducing barriers and expanding programming to underserved and overburdened neighborhoods throughout Tacoma. Through a competitive bidding process, the Tacoma Tree Foundation (TTF) was awarded the contract for the Community Tree Program mid-2023.

The Community Tree Program (CTP) is committed to delivering impactful tree planting opportunities and related educational programs driven by a foundation of equitable community engagement. This ensures consistent service delivery to Tacoma residents who face inter-woven challenges of low tree canopy, vulnerability to high-heat events, and thus disproportionate health impacts.

In 2023, the CTP successfully launched, establishing a strong demand for neighborhood trees and related community activities. In our first year, we distributed trees to 204 households, totaling 515 trees throughout Tacoma. If established, these trees will add 4.6 acres of mature tree canopy. 86% of the total trees distributed went to Priority Neighborhoods, with 40% being planted by 137 community volunteers. Furthermore, 42 residents received education and training on tree care practices. We headed into 2024 eager to build on that success and streamline processes in order to maximize our impact.



Critical components to the Community Tree Program:

- A community-centered approach to building authentic relationships with diverse audiences
- Training and workshops that aim to expand knowledge and enhance the technical skills of the community
- Tree programs that lower multiple barriers to tree planting
- Volunteer engagement that cultivates a robust cohort of volunteers and tree stewards that help facilitate the preservation, planting, and care of Tacoma's urban forest
- Community outreach and feedback that generate interest in current and new programming, along with conducting surveys, assist in updating approaches and services
- Community appreciation events and incentives that make time to celebrate our community and reflect on our shared achievements.

Partnership and Roles

The City's Urban Forestry Program aims to facilitate the connection between people, trees, and the natural environment while building community and are guided by the goals and actions outlined in the Urban Forest Management Plan (UFMP).

Urban forestry initiatives thrive when government organizations and community-based groups work collaboratively. Through partnership, each can leverage resources, unique skill sets, and expertise to tailor projects, programs, and/or strategies to specific needs of the community. Together we can enhance outreach efforts, build trust within the community, and ensure the long-term sustainability of urban green spaces enhanced by public participation and ultimately contribute to a healthier and more vibrant Tacoma.



*Tacoma Tree Foundation Staff (left)
City of Tacoma, Urban Forestry Staff (right)*

City of Tacoma, Urban Forestry's Role

The City of Tacoma's Urban Forestry team provides strategic leadership and resources to ensure equitable urban forestry outcomes while aligning actions with adopted policies and addressing barriers to participation. The City's role in the CTP includes:

- **Policy Alignment:** Coordinates with stakeholders and residents to align actions with the Urban Forest Management Plan (UFMP).
- **Resource Allocation:** Allocates \$75,000 annually for program administration and up to \$25,000 annually for materials such as trees, mulch, signage, and printed collateral.
- **Technical Support:** Provides training, on-site tree placement assistance, GIS mapping, and TreePlotter management.
- **Permit Requests:** Submits permit requests for right-of-way trees.
- **Leveraging Programs:** Utilizes City programs like Depave and Language Access to reduce barriers to participation.



Tacoma Tree Foundation's Role

Tacoma Tree Foundation (TTF) is a nonprofit organization focused on educating, empowering, and supporting community greening efforts across Tacoma, Pierce County, and the watersheds of Puget Sound. Our vision is to see trees in every neighborhood, healthy vibrant and cohesive communities that sustain tree planting, tree care and tree education—neighbors helping neighbors to grow a greener, healthier, and more connected Greater Tacoma.

Tacoma Tree Foundation possesses the community presence needed to excite the public about the benefits of our urban forest, to engage folks in caring for urban trees, and to listen and gather feedback on what barriers and challenges exist in the community.

TTF's role in the CTP includes:

- **Communications:** Develops a comprehensive communications strategy using social media, newsletters, and educational materials.
- **Community Engagement:** Conducts outreach through tabling at events, door-to-door visits, and neighborhood flyers.
- **Volunteer Coordination:** Recruits, trains, and manages volunteers for tree planting and related events.
- **Event Management:** Plans and executes tree-planting events, trainings, and celebrations.
- **Tracking & Reporting:** Collects and analyzes data to evaluate program outcomes and inform future efforts.

*Program Manager and Coordinator
at the Sustainability Expo.*

Program Overview

	2023	2024
Trees distributed	515	747
Households received trees	204	292
Volunteers engaged	152	168
Volunteer hours	377	672
Community outreach events attended	13	13
Residents trained	42	51
Trees volunteer planted	40%	41%
Acres of mature tree canopy added	4.6	5.1
Trees distributed to neighborhoods of focus*	86%	79%



*Neighborhoods of focus included Eastside, South End, South Tacoma, Hilltop.

2024 Community Tree Program Timeline

Deliverables	Timeline
Annual planning meeting then monthly team meetings	February - December
Program planning and materials creation	March - June
Promotion of tree programs at community events	February - September
Tree Stewards recruitment and training	July - September
Green Blocks and Branch Out outreach	July - October
Tree Captain Training	August
Green Tacoma Day	October
Tree distribution & planting (<i>Green Blocks and Branch Out</i>)	October - November
Participant Surveys	November - December
Technical workshop	December
Community Appreciation Event	December
Final Reporting	December

2024 Tree Count

Event	City Funded	TTF Funded
Green Blocks	288	0
Branch Out	257	52
Green Tacoma Day	0	150
Total	747	



“A heartfelt thank you for all this involves even if I don’t personally receive a tree.” - Branch Out Participant

MAJOR ACTIVITIES

Community Engagement

Promotion of Community Tree Program at Community Events

We attended 13 community events in the following priority neighborhoods in 2024.

- Downtown:
 - 4/13 South Sound Sustainability Expo
 - 6/13 Tacoma Broadway Farmers Market
 - 6/29 Tacoma OceanFest
 - 7/13 Tacoma Pride Festival
 - 9/28 Camptoberfest at Campfire Coffee
- Hilltop:
 - 5/18 Mi Centro Food is Free Earth Day Event
 - 8/24 Hilltop Street Fair
- South End:
 - 6/6 Stafford Elementary School Resource Fair
 - 9/5 Reed Elementary School Traffic Garden Pop-up
- South Tacoma
 - 2/29 STAR Center Community Market Resource Fair
 - 3/21 Spotlight South Tacoma
 - 3/30 South Tacoma Library Mural Unveiling
 - 7/27 Tacoma Earth Gay
- Eastside
 - We did not attend any events in Eastside. (Note: See the below report on Branch Out, which we held at Eastside Community Center.)



Promoting Community Tree Program at the Sustainability Expo

The goal of attending community events is to meet new people and connect with them about neighborhood trees, the Community Tree Program, and how they might like to get involved. The above events varied widely in terms of the number of attendees, where most attendees live, level of attendee awareness of our program, and the amount of time spent in conversation. Events with environmental themes, such as the Sustainability Expo and OceanFest, provided important connections with prospective volunteers. Large events, like Tacoma Pride Festival and the Hilltop Street Fair, gave us exposure to a wider audience, while the school events gave us access to a more local audience of residents in the South End, where Green Blocks was taking place. And community resource fairs invite residents to consider trees alongside other resources they might be seeking related to health, education, and sustainability. These events showed the importance of showing up in a variety of places to make ourselves available to questions from the community and share about how folks can get involved in CTP activities.

Online Engagement

Online engagement plays a pivotal role in disseminating information about the Community Tree Program, and effective digital engagement requires investment of time. Social media creates a space where community members can engage directly by asking questions about events, programs, and general tree topics. TTF maintains accounts on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [YouTube](#). In 2024, TTF staff created 29 posts/reels promoting various programs and events directly related to the Community Tree Program.



Instagram posts about the Community Tree Program.

Community members also share their neighborhood pride on social media. People shared how grateful they were to receive trees last year and others are sharing how excited they are to be engaged next year.

Green Tacoma Day

Green Tacoma Day is a celebration of the Green Tacoma Partnership's work to restore urban green spaces, while Arbor Day celebrates the planting, growing, and caring of Tacoma's trees. 2024 marked the 30th year the Arbor Day Foundation has recognized Tacoma as a Tree City USA, and the 20th year it has recognized Tacoma Power as a Tree Line USA, for the City's commitment to maintaining a healthy tree canopy.

This year for Green Tacoma Day, we teamed up with a variety of partners to host a family-friendly tree share and activity day in Lincoln Heights Park. This park is located in the Tacoma Mall neighborhood, an area characterized by 10% tree canopy cover and 83% unplantable space (e.g., concrete, buildings, other impervious surfaces).

We invited partners to organize activities celebrating the theme of "What does greening mean to you?" Tents and tables were set up on the basketball court, which lent a fun, community feel to the event. Additional partners included: Washington State University Pierce County Master Gardeners, the Washington State University Forest Health Watch program, and Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department, and the local non-profit ReMakery Tacoma. Some highlights included ReMakery's fabric weaving station where kids created art with salvaged materials; tree trivia with WSU Forest Health Watch; and tree cone identification with the WSU Master Gardeners.

This event showcased a highly successful, creative, and family friendly approach to community engagement. We distributed tree coupons along with 150 trees and shrubs, 33 of which went to priority neighborhoods. This event was supported by 7 staff and 10 volunteers, three of whom were children. Together we welcomed 39 participants, including many children, with several attendees stopping by while shopping in the neighborhood or after volunteering at other Green Tacoma Day activities. Beyond plant distribution, this event created an inclusive alternative to traditional labor-intensive volunteer opportunities, offering meaningful opportunities for those seeking a different way to contribute to greening efforts.



"We just appreciate the tree program and thank you so much for the plants!" - Green Tacoma Day Tree Recipient

Green Blocks: Lincoln

TTF's signature Green Blocks program is an intensive community engagement and tree planting effort that takes place in select neighborhoods with low tree equity across the Tacoma area in partnership with local governments, including the City of Tacoma.

Engagement activities include canvassing, tabling, cooperating with partner organizations, volunteer mobilization, and building relationships with residents. Green Blocks offers not only free trees but also tree delivery, volunteer training, residential planting assistance, and watering tools. More information on Green Blocks, including past neighborhoods, is available at www.TacomaTreeFoundation.org/green-blocks.



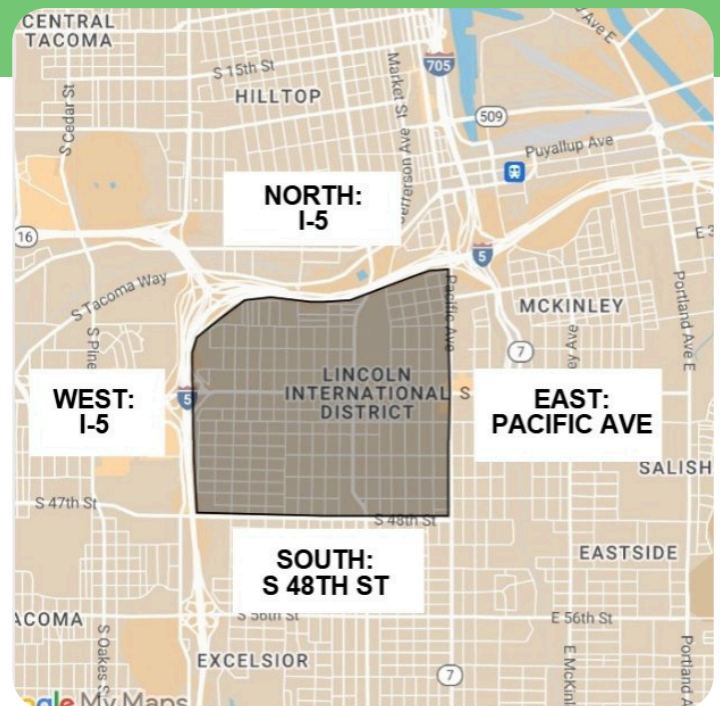
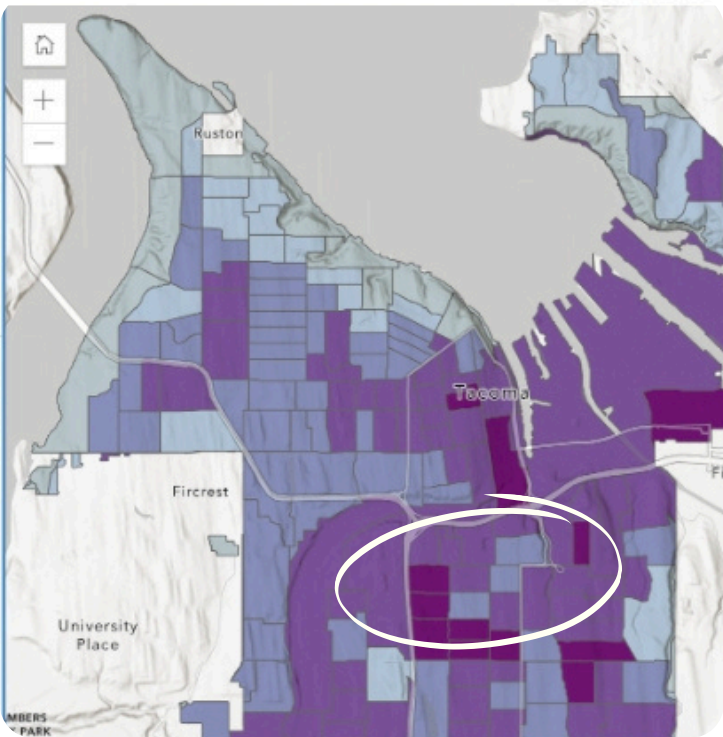
Green Blocks: Lincoln Timeline



Anticipating a growing interest in programming, the need for additional support became evident to ensure we could continue delivering the level of service offered through Green Blocks, as we are committed to lowering barriers to tree planting and fostering equitable access to urban forestry resources. Expanded capacity was made possible through the collaborative efforts of existing program staff, the establishment of a new partnership with Northwest Youth Corps (NYC), and the addition of a temporary Urban Forest Intern position. These enhancements have strengthened our ability to engage with the community, expand outreach, and support tree planting efforts in neighborhoods with the greatest need, through Green Blocks.

The Neighborhood

In 2024, Green Blocks was hosted in Tacoma's Lincoln neighborhood, identified through the City of Tacoma's Community Tree Map and Tree Planting Prioritization tool as an area with low tree equity and significant opportunities for improvement. The project boundaries were defined by Interstate 5 to the north and west, S. 48th Street to the south, and Pacific Avenue to the east. The extent of our project area received a "Moderate to Very High" prioritization score for tree planting compared to other areas in the city.



*City of Tacoma Planting Opportunity Map (Left)
Lincoln Street Signs (upper right) Green Blocks:
Lincoln project Boundary map (lower right)*

Community Engagement Approaches

Green Blocks: Lincoln focused on greening and community building in the Lincoln neighborhood, specifically through tree planting in the right-of-way at residential properties. In Tacoma, a major limitation to planting is that the adjacent property owner is responsible for the care and continued maintenance of street trees. In order to plant street trees, individual property owner consent is required. The most effective strategy to garner program interest and obtain this consent is a multi-faceted engagement approach with different touch points. Our initial goals were to have 120 households participate and to provide additional outreach to the blocks with the highest planting prioritization. The primary engagement approaches were as follows:

- *Flyering by TTF staff and volunteers.* Over 50 flyers were posted around the project area.
- *Mailers.* Around 3100 specialized mailers were sent to every property owner* in the project area. The mailers included detachable tree request forms that residents could mail back to project staff, with postage paid by the City. The mailers also included a QR code that linked to the [project web page](https://tacomatreefoundation.org/green-blocks-lincoln) (<https://tacomatreefoundation.org/green-blocks-lincoln>).
 - In the end, 5% of the mailers were mailed back to us, making up 61% of all tree requests.
 - Most mailer forms were submitted in the first week after delivery, with another wave coming several weeks later as a result of the canvassing effort.
 - Participants were allowed to mark “deciduous” or “evergreen” for their tree preference, plus how many trees they wanted (1, 2, 3, or “as many as can fit”).
 - (*NOTE: While many residents are renters, it is the property owners who receive the mailers because their permission is required for tree planting to take place. High rates of rentership in low-income neighborhoods represent another barrier to tree planting.)

Example Mailer

REQUEST YOUR FREE TREES

1) Which type of trees would you prefer:
 Evergreen Tree (keeps leaves year-round)
 Deciduous Tree (loses leaves in the fall)
 No Preference

2) How many trees would you prefer?
 1 Tree 2 Trees 3 Trees
 As many trees as can fit

3) Would you like planting assistance:
 Yes, I would like volunteers to plant my trees on Green Blocks planting day
 No, thank you. I will plant my own trees

4) Contact Information
TTF will contact you mid-September to confirm your selection and delivery. You must confirm by Oct 4th. Trees will be delivered the week of October 21st.
PHONE (required) _____
EMAIL (required) _____

5) Permission
I, _____ [PRINT NAME],
the owner of the property at _____

[PLANTING SITE ADDRESS], acknowledge that: I agree to allow the Tacoma Tree Foundation and its volunteers to deliver and/or plant one or more trees in the right-of-way adjacent to my home, and I accept ongoing ownership and responsibility for the tree(s). Tacoma Tree Foundation may contact me about this program via email, phone, and/or mail. I agree to let Tacoma Tree Foundation request a utility locate for my property's right-of-way. I will work with Tacoma Tree Foundation to arrange a tree delivery date, currently scheduled for the week of October 21st.
SIGNATURE _____

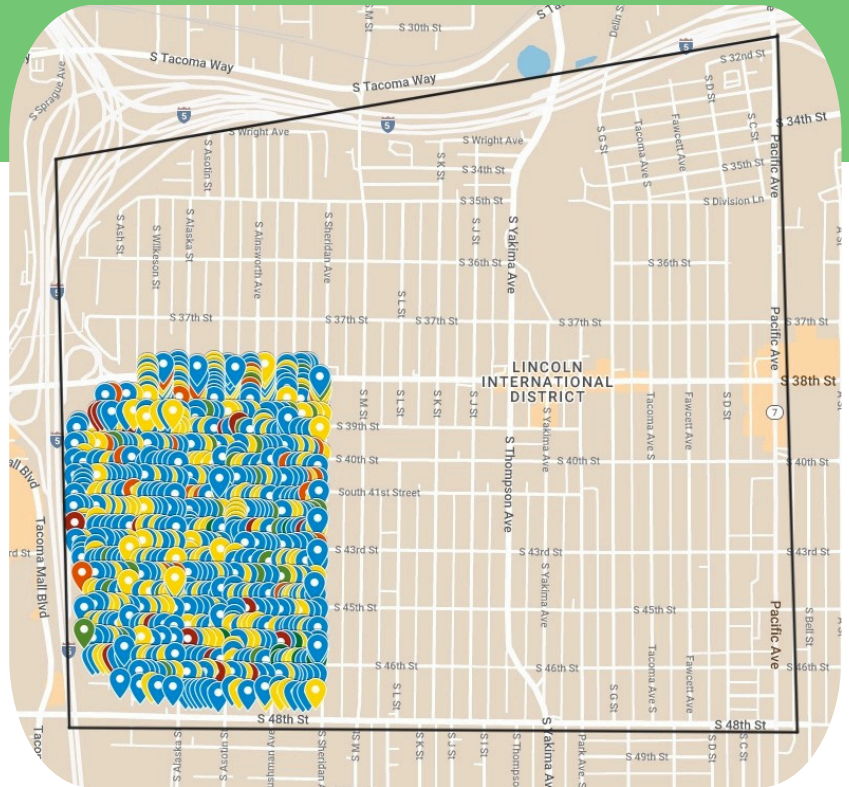
FREE TREES!

Green Blocks
The City of Tacoma Urban Forestry Program, in partnership with the Tacoma Tree Foundation, is offering free trees to Lincoln residents. The City of Tacoma Urban Forestry Program, in partnership with the Tacoma Tree Foundation, is offering free trees, delivery to your home, to Lincoln residents. The City of Tacoma Urban Forestry Program, in partnership with the Tacoma Tree Foundation, is offering free trees, delivery to your home, to Lincoln residents.

Program of Tacoma Tree Foundation in partnership with the Tacoma Tree Foundation, is offering free trees, delivery to your home, to Lincoln residents.

- Canvassing by TTF staff & volunteers.

- Within the project area, 2 census blocks were identified as having the highest priority, per the Planting Priority Map. These tracts had a planting prioritization score of Very High (-0.6– -0.7), an Equity Index rating of Very Low, an Urban Heat Island Average Temperature of 88°, and a Tree Canopy Cover of 12–14%.
- Over the course of 10 days in August, we dispatched 5 staff and 5 Northwest Youth Crews to walk every block within those areas, knocking on 1,446 doors and having conversations with residents. This face-to-face approach accounted for a high number of registrations. Canvassers successfully engaged 441 homes (30%). 81 (18%) of these residents showed high interest in participating. For safety, canvassers were encouraged to not approach any households that felt unsafe, due to blind spots in the yard or maybe an unleashed dog (5% of households).



City of Tacoma Planting Prioritization map (right) with priority census tracts outlined in white. Canvassing Outcomes (left) in priority census tracts. Blue pins indicate the canvassers knocked on the door with no response or engagement. Red indicates the canvassers did not feel comfortable approaching. Yellow indicates the residents were interacted with and green indicates the resident had a positive response.

Green Blocks

How participants connect with the program.

	McKinley 2023	Lincoln 2024
Mail Advertisement	40%	76%
Community Events	27%	6%
Social Media Word of Mouth	13%	12%
Email from TTF	5%	1%
Other	15%	2%



Effectiveness of Outreach Materials

- **Posters (8.5" x 11")**
 - We successfully placed 21 posters in storefronts and businesses. Ten more were provided to Lincoln High School staff to be posted in the hallways of the school. The rest of the fliers (approximately 20) were given to residents who posted them in their church, community gathering spaces, work places.
- **Half-page fliers (8.5" x 6.5")**
 - These proved to be the most accessible way to share the program information with the community. Around 500 half-page fliers were given to community members who expressed interest during canvassing and tabling efforts. Small stacks of 10–20 fliers were given to residents who wanted to provide the information at their community gathering spaces like schools, businesses, and churches.
- **Mailers (8.5" x 6.5", with returnable postcard)**
 - The mailers proved to be an accessible and successful way for residents to request trees! While only 5% of all mailers were returned, over 60% of the requests were made by accessing these postcards. The percentage of tree requests by physical postcard was higher than last year, which suggests that many people appreciate the ease of requesting trees via postcard (with postage paid by City of Tacoma).
- **Extra Mailers**
 - Two hundred extra mailers were not mailed, but rather used for canvassing and community engagement. Thirty to forty of those postcards were used by canvassers to share when residents were engaged at the door but could not locate the postcard that was mailed to them. Around 15 of the postcards submitted were filled out with the help of our canvassers. Extra mailers were also provided at outreach events for residents to complete in person. These extra postcards were an effective tool for helping folks sign up for the program during face-to-face conversations.



Example Fliers

Site Evaluation & Preparation

Once a homeowner indicated interest and provided consent, site visits were conducted to evaluate and prepare the right-of-way for street trees. In order to determine whether properties had adequate space for tree planting in the right-of-way, we conducted a series of site visits for every request that came in.

- Address Verification: Addresses were checked to determine if they were located within the project area. Those not in the boundaries were referred to Branch Out.
- Initial Site Assessments:
 - Site visits were conducted at over 150 properties confirmed to be within our project area.
 - During these site assessments, program staff documented infrastructure, existing trees, and visible utilities (e.g. power lines, fire hydrants) and measured the width of the planting areas.
 - Sites that met the basic spacing requirements for planting in the right-of-way were then marked with white paint in preparation for the submission of utility requests.
 - Sites unable to accommodate street trees were referred to Branch Out for yard trees, directed to TTF tree shares for smaller shrubs, or invited to volunteer at our planting event
 - Sites requiring additional intervention due to soil compaction and/or paved right-of ways were noted for “Depave” consideration.
- Utility Locate Assistance: TTF staff submitted over 200 utility requests on behalf of the property owners to ensure planting locations met offset standards for infrastructure.
- Second Round of Site Visits:
 - Once utilities were marked by the companies, a second round of site visits was conducted to determine the number and species type suitable for planting according to “right tree, right place” standards. Suggested locations for trees were marked with small wood stakes and paint.
- Depave:
 - Eight properties were identified as requiring additional intervention in order to support viable planting. The City of Tacoma’s Environmental Services Department created 17 new plantable locations by converting compacted or paved spaces into plantable areas with amended soils and mulch.
 - The depaving process was significantly improved this year due to enhanced training and streamlined communication among TTF, City staff, and residents.



Measuring the planting space in the right of way.

In addition, the properties were assessed for the presence of compacted gravel or pavement in the right-of-way, where tree planting would not have been advised. Inadequate soil condition represents yet another barrier to planting trees in Tacoma, so offering “depaving” services—removal of compacted materials plus the addition of soil amendments and wood chips—increases access to tree planting. Thanks to City of Tacoma Environmental Services, 8 properties received depaving treatments and were converted to plantable space with trees and mulch, including one site that had been fully paved; 17 trees were planted on these sites. This depaving process was much improved this year due to increased training and streamlined communications between TTF, City staff, and residents. (TTF sent addresses to the City; City staff assessed the depaving treatment required; and TTF handled the communication with residents.)

Tree Offers

- Following the tree request deadline, TTF staff engaged with participants to provide recommended tree species and quantities in alignment with City standards. Communication methods included phone calls, text messages, emails, and in-person meetings tailored to each participant’s needs.
- This stage represents one of the most time-intensive steps in the process; however, it is critical for building trust with residents and ensuring program outcomes meet participant expectations.
- Through these communications, participants either accepted, declined, or partially accepted tree offers. In partial acceptance cases, households opted for one recommended tree species while declining others. The most commonly cited reason was a preference for deciduous trees over coniferous trees.
- In some cases, participants opted to not move forward in the program at this stage. This included 7 households that declined 10 trees and 21 households that did not respond to 30 trees offered. Non-responses were interpreted as a decision not to participate, allowing staff to focus resources on active participants.

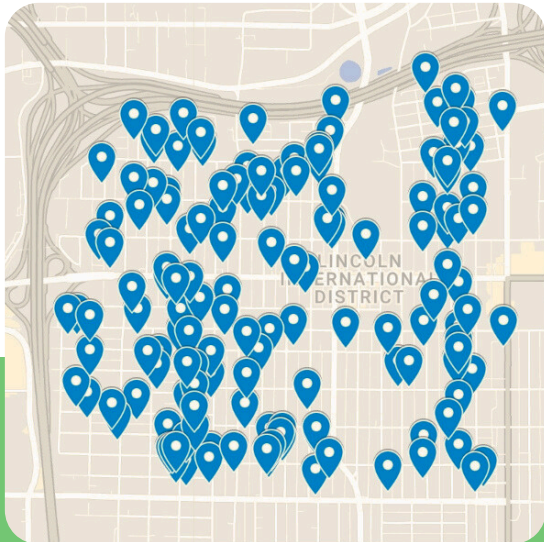


“I’ve never planted a tree on my property because I was always too overwhelmed by the permitting and planting considerations. Thank you for providing that service! I love my trees! - Green Blocks: Lincoln participant

Staff with resident after tree planting.

Trees & Materials Delivery

Transportation challenges are a known barrier to planting for many participants. To address proactively, program staff incorporated tree and material delivery in our approach. Along with individual trees, participants received essential materials to support tree establishment including TAGRO soil amendments, tree stakes and ties, watering devices, and wood chips.



Delivery map (left) and Staff and Youth Crews (right) in front of a truck and trailer loaded with mulch, trees, stakes and soil set for delivery.



Before



After

Wood chips were introduced as a new material in 2024, with the intent to enhance establishment and encourage ongoing maintenance. Wood chips help support the establishment of new trees by assisting with moisture retention, weed suppression, and protection from lawn care machines, while also creating a more finished appearance for the newly planted trees.

Tree Planting (the fun part!)

The neighborhood planting event took place on October 26th. This was also the City of Tacoma’s official Arbor Day celebration event. We gathered in Lincoln Park to divide into teams and watch a planting demonstration before dispersing throughout the neighborhood. The training of new Tree Captains earlier in the season—as well as continued support from Northwest Youth Crews—enabled us to send a record 16 planting teams into the neighborhood. Despite the rainy conditions, 82 volunteers provided 328 hours of service!

Through Green Blocks: Lincoln, we distributed 288 trees to 150 households in the area. Of those trees, 233 were planted with and for residents by volunteers, program staff, and Northwest Youth Corps crews. That means 81% of households took advantage of the planting assistance offered.



Volunteers and staff gathering before planting trees in Lincoln.

Northwest Youth Corps

The establishment of a new partnership with Northwest Youth Corps (NYC) provided critical capacity for Green Blocks: Lincoln. In addition to the teen crews supporting canvassing in the summer, the Northwest Youth Corps provided 2 young adult crews, each with 5 crew members. These crews contributed over 70 hours of work from material prep, tree loading, tree planting, residential support and event support. NYC provided transportation, tools, safety gear and crew leads with each crew. With this additional capacity, program staff were able to meet rising interest in participation without reducing the level of service we offer to appropriately reduce barriers to tree planting.



Northwest Youth Corps members supporting CTP



Green Blocks: Lincoln



277

Households
requested trees

150

Households received
trees

288

Trees distributed

233

Trees also planted

82

Volunteers

328

Volunteer hours

"This is a fantastic program. Our family is very excited to watch our new tree grow. Thank you to all the volunteers and managers of this program! I hope this program extends to other neighborhoods in Tacoma and throughout the South Puget Sound." - Green Blocks: Lincoln participant

Lessons Learned

Green Blocks: Lincoln shattered our expectations! Our initial goal included distributing 300 trees to 120 households. While we fell 12 trees shy of our goal of distributing 300 trees, we surpassed our participant goal with 277 households initially requesting to participate and 150 households ultimately receiving trees.

- **Expanded Project Area:** The project area was approximately 600 households larger than our 2023 project area, offering more residents the opportunity to participate. While the high number of unique tree requests was thrilling, it required a significant increase in staff time and relationship-building. Moving forward, the project area should be closely calibrated to match staff capacity to ensure effective program delivery.
- **High Demand for Planting Assistance:** The strong demand planting assistance suggests that these services are highly valued by residents. This interest creates an opportunity for the Community Tree Program to ensure best practices for tree planting and tree placement to promote long-term survival while minimizing conflicts between trees and infrastructure.
- **Utility Locate Challenges:** Requesting utilities on behalf of homeowners remains a logistical challenge. With limited program staff submitting locate requests, and utility companies unaccustomed to processing such a large volume of requests within a narrow time frame, this aspect requires refinement. We will continue working with utilities service providers to streamline this process, balancing the needs of residents as well as those of the utility providers and their staff.
- **Partnerships & Capacity:** This year, partnerships played a critical role in supplementing staffing capacity, enabling us to meet the high demand for Green Blocks. Looking ahead, continued collaboration and unique funding sources will be essential to maintain or expand our level of service.

Staff marking planting sites



Green Blocks over the Years

Since its pilot launch in 2022, the Green Blocks program has demonstrated remarkable growth, increasing community engagement, tree distribution, and volunteer participation. Each year, the program has been tailored to meet the needs of different Tacoma neighborhoods, showing clear progress and success.

Here's a look at the program's evolution:

- **2022 (Tacoma Mall Pilot):** The pilot project area encompassed 1,400 households, with 36 households (2.6%) accepting 75 trees. While modest in scale, the pilot provided a critical foundation for refining the program's approach and gauging community interest.

- 2023 (McKinley Hill): In its second year, the program expanded its reach to 2,600 households, doubling the project area from 2022. Interest grew significantly, with 169 households expressing interest, and 110 households (4.2% of the total project area) ultimately accepting 234 trees, a 212% increase in tree adoption compared to 2022 $((234-75)/75 \times 100)$. Depaving opportunities were introduced, resulting in 33 trees being planted across 18 properties. Volunteer involvement also became a key factor, with 56 volunteers planting 156 trees, accounting for 67% of all trees planted that year $(156/234 \times 100)$.
- 2024 (Lincoln): The program reached its largest project area yet, encompassing 3,100 households. Interest spiked, with 277 households expressing interest—a 64% increase from 2023 $((277-169)/169 \times 100)$ —and 150 households (4.8% of the total project area) accepting 288 trees, marking a 23% increase in tree adoption from the previous year $((288-234)/234 \times 100)$. Depaving efforts continued with 17 trees planted across 8 properties, while volunteer engagement hit a new high. 82 volunteers contributed 328 hours, planting 233 trees, which represented 81% of all trees planted that year $(233/288 \times 100)$.

Over three years, the Green Blocks program has increased its impact across all metrics, growing tree adoption by 284% and volunteer participation by 46% since 2023. These results highlight the community's enthusiasm and the importance of strategic partnerships, funding, and planning to sustain and expand this neighborhood-based program.

Green Blocks Over the Years			
	2022: Tacoma Mall (pilot, grant funded)	2023: McKinley	2024: Lincoln
Households in project area	1400	2600	3100
Households canvassed	353*	280*	1446
Households interested	44*	169	277
Trees offered	75*	234	328
Trees accepted	75	228	288
Final households	36	110	150
Depave (households & trees)	N/A	18 houses, 33 trees	8 houses, 17 trees
Trees planted by volunteers	58	156	233
Volunteer number	21	56	82
Volunteer hours	105	225	328

*estimated

Branch Out

Branch Out is an annual free tree giveaway event organized by multiple partnering organizations with the goal to increase tree canopy across Tacoma and Pierce County. The program seeks to uplift and call out the intersection of trees, human health, equity, and community building. In 2024, our fourth Branch Out event was held on November 9th and 16th at the Eastside Community Center. Partnering organizations and their roles included:

- Tacoma Tree Foundation: community engagement, event promotion, volunteer recruitment and management, walk-up event coordination, supervision of planting activities, language support, and providing trees to residents outside Tacoma city limits.
- City of Tacoma: tree acquisition, delivery of trees and materials to event location and residents, walk-up event support, meal coordination for volunteers, and language ambassador coordination.
- Pierce Conservation District: management of tree requests, “right tree, right place” guidance, participant communications, data management, and planting event support.
- MetroParks Tacoma: event support, permissions, and hosting.
- Language Ambassadors—Katelyn Huynh, Iuliia Didkivska, Svetlana Konotopchik, Eunice Ham and Sandra Garibaldi: translation and interpretation for speakers of Spanish, Vietnamese, Korean, Ukrainian, and Russian.
- Northwest Youth Corps: Support loading, unloading and staging trees the day prior to the tree share. Resident support loading and unloading trees during the tree share and event breakdown.

*“It was wonderful to see the amount of people that want to become better stewards of the land by planting trees.”
- Branch Out Participant*

Staff providing tree guidance at Branch Out



Event Changes and Localization

This year, Branch Out was split into two events a tree share “walk-up” event and a volunteer planting event—on consecutive weekends. This was strategic to ensure adequate staff could support each critical aspect of Branch Out wholly. Another strategic decision was made to reduce city-wide event promotion and shift to a more localized promotion, focusing on the priority neighborhoods of Hilltop, Eastside, South End, and South Tacoma. These changes aimed to increase participation within these communities.



Tree Share

At the “walk-up” tree share event, participants had the opportunity to take home trees on a first-come, first-served basis. Sixty-eight households took home trees at the tree share. Additional trees that were requested in advance were delivered after the event, along with participants who requested delivery assistance at the tree share. All participants received tree supplies to assist with tree maintenance and survival, including TAGRO, tree stakes and ties, and watering devices.

Community volunteers and Northwest Youth Corps staff were crucial in ensuring a smooth flow of the event, providing friendly and professional guidance for participants—from checking, selecting the right tree for the right place, receiving planting and tree care instructions, and even assisting with loading large trees into small vehicles.

Language ambassadors provided translation services in Spanish, Vietnamese, Korean, Ukrainian, and Russian, ensuring that all participants had access to the event in their preferred language. This multilingual engagement was essential for equitable engagement and is further discussed in the “Equity and Environmental Justice Impacts” section below.

Planting Event

The planting event served as a gathering place and launching point for volunteer teams that assisted homeowners with planting trees that had already been delivered. Following a brief planting orientation by TTF staff, representatives from each partnering organization gave introductory speeches.

The planting event was highly efficient, thanks to 10 teams of volunteers. With trees and supplies already delivered and residents responsible for calling utilities, the teams quickly accomplished their goals. Many of the planting volunteers were first-time participants, contributing fresh energy and enthusiasm to the program.

Totals

At Branch Out 2024, 190 trees were distributed to City of Tacoma residents, including 65 that were planted by volunteers. (*Note: Data for non-Tacoma residents is not included in these totals. No City funds were directed to residents outside city limits.)

Lessons Learned

- **Two Separate Events:** Hosting two separate events for Branch Out allowed staff to focus on the distinct logistical needs for both major aspects of Branch out—the tree share and the planting event. However, it also demanded more staff capacity during a busy season. In 2025, Branch Out partners will assess which approach better meets the goals of the program, balancing efficiency with community needs.
- **Language Assistance:** The addition of Korean language support this year, while maintaining previous language support, proved valuable in increasing access for folks with limited English proficiency. Language ambassadors helped residents engage in their preferred language, resulting in increased participation and access to the event for diverse community members.
- **Increased Focus on Priority Neighborhoods:** An increased number of Branch Out trees were planted in priority neighborhoods in 2024 (79%), as compared to 2023 (54%). The decision to reduce city-wide promotion may have been one reason for this.

“My partner and I are new homeowners and want to bring more shade and tree canopy to our large yard. We want to invite more nature to our south end neighborhood.” - Branch Out pre-request participant



Urban Forestry Community Events

Tree Stewards Training

Growing the urban forest requires strong policy, effective planting and care for trees, and also a web of trained tree champions—Tree Stewards. Our free Tree Stewards program aims to grow this web of local tree champions. Through this one-day training program, taught by TTF Founder and Certified Arborist Sarah Low, stewards learn proper planting techniques, tree care best practices, local regulations, and how to answer tree-related questions.

This training at Eastside Community Center equipped 13 new Stewards with the skills they need to engage their communities in discussions about urban forestry, and to protect, maintain, and advocate for tree canopy coverage in Tacoma. This level of participation increased from the previous year of 8 stewards receiving this training.

“Now I'm constantly looking at public right-of-ways and their trees (or especially their lack of trees) and imagining what COULD be!” - Tree Steward

Tree Captain Vest

Tree Captains Training

Tree Captains are volunteer leaders who help grow urban canopy by leading tree planting teams during large events, such as Green Blocks and Branch Out. Through our 1–2-hour training, Captains learn how to plant trees, understand regulations, interact with residents, and create a welcoming environment for everyone. On planting day, Captains are on-site leaders who help guide their volunteer groups on best management practices of tree planting and placement.

We held a Tree Captains Training on Zoom in August 2024, with the option of participating in a hands-on tree planting orientation in September. An additional option was provided of “shadowing” an experienced tree captain at one of the events, which meant that individuals were able to match their involvement to their comfort and experience levels. There was also an optional appreciation party held for Tree Captains, where they received special vests and badges provided by TTF.

In all, 15 Tree Captains were trained in 2024, many of whom started as tree recipients and/or became tree stewards. The expansion of this program was one of the highlights of the year, as the additional leadership capacity from community volunteers enabled us to send out more volunteer teams than ever before, creating new and rewarding experiences for volunteers.



Technical Workshop

Proper tree care is just as important as planting and distributing trees, and this year, we hosted a tree care workshop on structural pruning. There is a growing demand from both Tree Stewards and tree recipients for technical pruning skills. This workshop was tailored to homeowners with trees planted 3–5 years ago, which are now at an ideal stage to be evaluated for structural pruning to encourage healthy growth and reduce costly maintenance further down the road. Participants learned that pruning at this stage helps trees develop a strong structure early, ensuring an extended and healthier life, and require less corrective pruning as they mature.

The 2-hour workshop was led by Sarah Low and took place at Wright Park, thanks to the support of Metro Parks Tacoma. The first session began indoors with lessons on how pruning contributes to healthy trees and widespread canopy; it continued with hands-on pruning lessons outdoors in Wright Park, assessing newly planted trees, as well as trees established for 3-5 years. Twenty-three residents attended the training, surpassing our expectations and suggesting that Tacoma residents are eager for knowledge about how to properly care for young trees!



“The part of the workshop I found most valuable was the mix of class and hands on. Also, it is helpful to hear the experts verbally process when looking at trees.” -Technical workshop participant

Community Appreciation

To close out the year, we celebrated our volunteers and partners with a community gathering at the Tacoma Nature Center. By partnering with Infinite Soups, we were able to provide a free hot soup bar as an appreciation for volunteers! There were also hot drinks, a slide show, a raffle, and remarks from program staff highlighting impacts and encouraging continued support for a growing Tacoma canopy. Forty people were in attendance, which was a fantastic turnout for a dark winter’s night!

EQUITY & ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE IMPACTS

The Community Tree Program’s focus is to steward Tacoma’s urban forest by reducing barriers and expanding programming to underserved and overburdened neighborhoods throughout Tacoma.

The Community Tree Program’s focus areas are “Priority Neighborhoods,” as defined in the [City’s Tacoma Community Forestry Map](#) and [Tree Planting Prioritization Tool](#). Priority neighborhoods are defined as (1) being moderate, low, and very low according to the Equity Index (2) having low tree canopy, and (3) having high urban heat. Intentionally focusing on these areas will ensure these communities have an active role in stewarding Tacoma’s urban forest and improving our program’s accessibility and cultural relevance.

Guided by the CTP vision, we provide educational information and activities at each event to enhance awareness regarding the importance of healthy urban forests; to highlight the intersection of trees, equity, and human health; and to foster connections between community members and their urban forests. We also acknowledge Native presence and stewardship of the land at each event by highlighting the current and historical impacts of colonization on Puyallup Tribal land.



Priority Neighborhoods

Significant efforts have been directed to our low opportunity areas, with 88.6% of all trees distributed through the Community Tree Program, falling within our Priority Neighborhoods like, Hilltop, Eastside, South End, and South Tacoma. More specifically, 100% of Green Blocks trees and 79% of all Branch Out trees distributed to City of Tacoma residents were in low opportunity areas.

Tree in Low Equity Areas

2023

86%
Total
515 Trees

100%
Green Blocks
234 trees

72%
Branch Out
281 Trees

2024

88%
Total
510 Trees

100%
Green Blocks
288 trees

79%
Branch Out
219 Trees

Multilingual Community Engagement

Authentic relationship building with diverse audiences is critical to developing equitable engagement. Multilingual community engagement is critical to reaching, involving, and engaging underrepresented and overburdened communities. Recognizing the importance of equitable engagement and language access in programming, the City allocated additional dollars and staff time to support multilingual aspects of the Community Tree Program. We employed various multilingual engagement strategies across different platforms. In 2024, we built on last year's successful urban forestry language access program pilot project.

A Language Ambassador is a community member who is fully bilingual and possesses language skills that can offer full cultural translations that are completely understood and maintain the original meaning and intent. Ambassadors have extensive networks in the community and can share nuances of how specific language-speaking groups in Tacoma communicate with one another in terms of dialects, behaviors, gathering places, social media, and digital application uses. Ambassadors attended a "State of Tacoma's Urban Forest" presentation and were invited to provide perspectives on the City's 2030 canopy goals.

All ambassadors who participated in 2023 returned in 2024. They brought with them friends, neighbors, and family members who were able to access free trees and information in a meaningful way. We expanded services to include Korean language assistance extending the program to another of Tacoma's top languages spoken.

Russian, Ukrainian, Vietnamese, Spanish, and Korean language ambassadors assisted the Branch Out communications team by translating event flyers and conducted outreach at significant gathering places of these language speaking groups.



Language Ambassadors at Branch Out

Language Ambassadors (LAs) provided the majority of promotion for Branch Out, as outreach in English was intentionally scaled down. In fact, posts for Branch Out on TTF social media were conducted only in languages other than English.

At the tree share event, LAs provided interpretation, community connection resources and support, and all five languages were utilized by participants. Participants were invited to share demographic data, 42% of whom self-reported that they spoke another language other than English at home.

Collaborating with the Ambassadors has taught us that multilingual outreach is not only about providing materials in any given language; it is also a matter of creating meaningful connections within the communities this program hopes to serve and engage with. There is understandable distrust of the government, with some participants reluctant to provide personal information and addresses, for example. Ambassadors allowed us to translate the intent of collecting information—to measure participation and equity impacts—which ultimately made individuals comfortable enough to provide this information.

Building authentic relationships with community members through multilingual outreach opens a door to trust and engagement. The presence of Language Ambassadors at Branch Out was essential to building this trust and created a real path to participation for several communities previously disconnected from our work. This success highlights the importance of embedding language access as a cornerstone of at least one element of the Community Tree Program.

Branch Out promotion in Spanish.



To further strengthen and expand our multilingual engagement, we recommend conducting a language access needs assessment to identify the specific languages, tree care topics, and/or resources required to meet the needs of Tacoma's diverse population with respect to urban forestry programming. Based on guidance from the U.S. Department of Justice, organizations often allocate 5–15% of their total project or operational budget for language access services. This funding would support critical elements, such as translation interpretation, outreach, and training for multilingual volunteers. By seeking alternative funding methods for language access, we can continue to deepen community connections and ensure that events like Branch Out remain inclusive and impactful for all residents, regardless of language barriers.

Every time I volunteer with TTF, I feel a sense of belonging and purpose that is really empowering. This time around, I was inspired by how many different languages I heard during the Branch Out event. I hadn't realized just how busy our interpreters would be!"
-Branch Out Volunteer

Planting Assistance

Planting Assistance is a cornerstone of our efforts to lower barriers to access and engagement. Recognizing that tree planting requires time, tools, knowledge and physical ability (resources not accessible to everyone), both our Branch Out and Green Blocks opportunities provided planting assistance to those in need.

As part of the CTP vision to engage community members in the holistic process of caring for urban trees, Tacoma Tree Foundation recruits and trains Tree Captains and other community volunteers to provide engaging and friendly tree planting assistance. In 2024, our Branch Out event provided planting assistance to a total of 18 households, totaling 65 trees. Our Green Blocks: Lincoln effort provided planting assistance to 118 households, planting 233 trees. This is a 46% increase from last year, suggesting this is a highly valued service that lowers barriers to tree planting.



Participant Demographics

Collecting demographic information for the Community Tree Program helps us assess the program's reach, identify any disparities or gaps in services, and demonstrate accountability to stakeholders. While all participants are invited to share their demographic information, around two thirds of people choose not to share.

Among those that did report, the following trends on race/ethnicity emerged:

- 56% of Green Blocks participants identified as White only, down from 70% in 2023. Racial representation included Multiracial (14%), American Indian (5%), Hispanic/Latino (4%), Asian (3%), and Black or African American (1%).
- 50% of Branch Out participants identified as White only, down from 66% in 2023. Racial representation included Hispanic/Latino (13%), Multiracial (9%), Asian (9%), American Indian (3%), and Black or African American (3%).

We will strive to improve this data collection each year, so that the program can accurately analyze its impact in these communities.



Conclusion

In its second year, the Community Tree Program saw meaningful increases in the number of trees planted and community members engaged. Our strategies around equitable community engagement led to new levels of volunteer involvement and community capacity-building around the preservation, planting, and care of Tacoma's urban forest.

The following are just some examples of the valuable lessons learned that will inform the implementation of the Community Tree Program in future years.

- Growing demand for CTP resources: Through community engagement, providing tree matching services, and visiting program participants' properties for guidance on tree placement and species, it was clear that most residents could benefit from more trees than they were requesting. A number of Green Blocks participants selected the new category "as many trees as will fit," which allowed staff to assess the sites and propose an ideal level of tree coverage for those properties.
- Increased capacity paid dividends in terms of efficiency and workload: TTF added a full-time staff person, and City of Tacoma Urban Forestry added a part-time staff member. The added contributions of Northwest Youth Corps allowed us to improve our level of service with respect to site assessments, planting, material deliveries, and event support. TTF was able to purchase a truck and trailer, which greatly assisted with tree deliveries and event logistics.
- Each tree planted through this program represents a relationship: It takes time to connect with each resident, address any tree fears they might have, match them with trees, and assist with utility locates. All of that work precedes the planting and maintenance of new trees. Offering post-event resources, appreciations and participant surveys often resulted in continued support, problem-solving, and connection.



- Green Blocks planting day requires more time: Despite a record number of volunteers, some trees from Green Blocks: Lincoln needed to be planted after the event concluded. Some reasons for this were: time constraints on planting day or a lack of complete utility markings made prior to the event.
- Volunteers are one of the major engines of the Community Tree Program. We saw a growth in volunteers this year, and that is the result of consistent community engagement, training, leadership, data tracking, and celebration.

In 2024, the Community Tree Program provided vibrant opportunities for communities to connect with each other and the urban tree canopy. Moving into 2025, we will continue to collect participant feedback, stories, demographic data, and impacts in order to communicate with Tacoma residents about the opportunities available to them through this vital community-based program.



“You guys are awesome! Smooth, seamless process with friendly and educated volunteers! A heartfelt thank you for all this involves. Even if I didn’t personally receive a tree. We just really appreciate this program being offered, and the expert help planting was amazing!” -Branch Out participant

MEET THE TEAM



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**Thank you for supporting another year of
the Tacoma Community Tree Program.**

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