

# Phoenix funding trees and shade structures for underserved communities



**Zach Bradshaw** (<https://cronkitenews.azpbs.org/people/zach-bradshaw/>)/Cronkite News  
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(Video by [Zach Bradshaw](https://cronkitenews.azpbs.org/people/zach-bradshaw/) (<https://cronkitenews.azpbs.org/people/zach-bradshaw/>), and [Hunter Fore](https://cronkitenews.azpbs.org/people/hunter-fore/) (<https://cronkitenews.azpbs.org/people/hunter-fore/>)/Cronkite News)

PHOENIX – The city of Phoenix is dedicating millions of dollars to increase tree and shade coverage for underserved communities.

The Office of Heat Response and Mitigation is accepting applications from public schools and neighborhoods to receive grant funds for tree and shade structure installation in qualified census tracts (<https://hudgis-hud.opendata.arcgis.com/datasets/qualified-census-tracts-1/explore?location=33.498399%2C-112.151439%2C11.00>) – communities with a poverty rate of 25% or more, or with 50% of households with incomes below 60% of the area median gross income.

Three available grants – Community Canopy ([https://phoenix-gov.formstack.com/forms/canopy\\_for\\_kids\\_grant\\_application](https://phoenix-gov.formstack.com/forms/canopy_for_kids_grant_application)), Canopy for Kids ([https://phoenix-gov.formstack.com/forms/canopy\\_for\\_kids\\_grant\\_application](https://phoenix-gov.formstack.com/forms/canopy_for_kids_grant_application)), and Shade for Students ([https://phoenix-gov.formstack.com/forms/canopy\\_for\\_kids\\_grant\\_application](https://phoenix-gov.formstack.com/forms/canopy_for_kids_grant_application)) – are intended to improve shade landscapes at schools and places that provide services for youth and to improve shade coverage in pedestrian places and residential sites.

Funds can be used for trees, planting supplies, contracting and construction services, architectural supplies and inspecting, depending on the grant.

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Schools or nonprofits that provide youth services can receive up to \$75,000, while neighborhoods and community nonprofit organizations can receive up to 200 trees and up to \$2,000 to spend on community events related to tree planting.

Lora Martens, the urban tree program manager at the Office of Heat Response and Mitigation, said there is an urgent need to implement shade coverage at Valley schools that may not have enough cool areas.

“The youth are some of the most vulnerable to heat and ... sun exposure,” Martens said. “Their smaller bodies are still growing.”

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, children are more likely than adults to lose fluid quickly and become dehydrated in extreme heat. The EPA recommends children stay indoors during periods of extreme heat.

The Arizona Department of Health Services [reported](https://www.azdhs.gov/documents/preparedness/epidemiology-disease-control/extreme-weather/pubs/heat-related-mortality-year.pdf) (https://www.azdhs.gov/documents/preparedness/epidemiology-disease-control/extreme-weather/pubs/heat-related-mortality-year.pdf) 336 heat-related deaths in 2021 in Maricopa County, more than all other Arizona counties combined. There were 1,731 heat-related deaths in the county from 2011 to 2021.



A lack of foliage in some Phoenix neighborhoods can create a heat island effect, causing the affected areas to be several degrees hotter than other neighborhoods. (Photo by [Hunter Fore](https://cronkitenews.azpbs.org/people/hunter-fore/) (https://cronkitenews.azpbs.org/people/hunter-fore/)/Cronkite News)

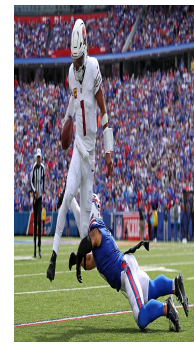
### What are the grant program benefits?

The heat office is funding the grant project through the American Rescue Plan Act.

Shading streets and walkways has been a city priority, and the 2010 [Tree and Shade Master Plan](https://www.phoenix.gov/oepsite/Documents/Tree%20and%20Shade%20Master%20Plan.pdf) (https://www.phoenix.gov/oepsite/Documents/Tree%20and%20Shade%20Master%20Plan.pdf) set the goal of increasing the city’s canopy coverage to roughly 25% by 2030.

The plan targets urban heat islands – areas which can have temperatures 15 degrees warmer than the surrounding area. These areas can experience an increase in air temperature because heat intensifies in cement, asphalt and other surfaces when the sun hits it.

An increase in shade can lessen temperatures and reduce water and energy consumption.



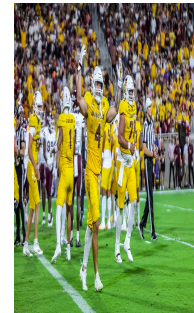
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The grant program seeks to advance fairness in urban environments, specifically within qualified census tracts, which are designated by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

“If you have more trees, then you have cleaner air. That protection from the sun protects people from short-term and long-term ... health impacts,” Martens said. “If we can ... provide more shade for people, (they) can be outside and active just even a few more hours of the day (and) that will actually have ... health impacts.”

Martens said planting trees is beneficial in numerous ways, including decreasing surface temperatures, lowering costs of cooling homes and improving health factors.

“There’s infinite, infinite benefits to having an increased tree shade canopy coverage in our city,” Martens said.



A Phoenix street is sparsely populated with foliage. (Photo by [Hunter Fore](https://cronkitenews.azpbs.org/people/hunter-fore/) (<https://cronkitenews.azpbs.org/people/hunter-fore/>)/Cronkite News)

### Tree, shade coverage lacking in some neighborhoods

In 2022, Phoenix partnered with the nonprofit American Forests, a national conservation organization, to increase “[tree equity](https://cronkitenews.azpbs.org/2023/04/07/shade-trees-combat-arizona-heat-deaths/) (<https://cronkitenews.azpbs.org/2023/04/07/shade-trees-combat-arizona-heat-deaths/>)” in Phoenix communities. Tree equity refers to equalizing tree coverage for all neighborhoods.

Phoenix uses American Forests’ [Tree Equity Score map](https://www.treeequityscore.org/map#10.9/33.4704/-112.0244) (<https://www.treeequityscore.org/map#10.9/33.4704/-112.0244>), a tool that assesses neighborhoods on a 100-point scale based on the number of trees people can benefit from. The map, organized into census block groups, takes into account demographics such as race, poverty level and unemployment.

“Those areas have been historically disinvested in,” said Ali Guttenberg, planting programs manager at Trees Matter, a Phoenix-based nonprofit whose mission is to increase citywide tree canopy cover. “The connection is pretty easy to make when you look at those maps. ... People were forced into those less desirable areas where there’s more industry. ... That’s now where there’s less trees.”



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Guttenberg said residents living in qualified census tracts are less likely to be involved in tree planting because of financial constraints.



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### 1 Find your score.

- Search a location or address, or browse the map of nearly 200,000 Tree Equity Scores.

Numerous census block groups near the Camelback East, Sunnyslope and Vista del Cerro neighborhoods have tree equity scores of 100, meaning the neighborhood has reached canopy coverage greater than or equal to 15%. Many of these areas are not qualified census tracts.

Numerous census block groups with low tree equity scores, however, are located near Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport and south Phoenix.

One such tract – bounded by Van Buren Street to the north, 35th Avenue to the west, 31st Avenue to the east and Harrison Street to the south – received a tree equity score of 64, with canopy coverage of 5%.

According to the map, 96% of the census tract’s population are people of color, while 80% of residents are in poverty. The unemployment rate is 10%. Included in the census tract are Out West Trailer Park and Sullivan Elementary School.

“Tree canopy cover is not distributed equally across the city,” said Ariane Middel, senior global futures scientist at Arizona State University’s Julie Ann Wrigley Global Futures Laboratory.

“There are areas in the city that have more trees and areas that have less trees and, unfortunately, areas that would need the trees the most such as low-income neighborhoods, south Phoenix, those areas traditionally have the lowest tree canopy cover.”

### Canopy goal is ‘ambitious’

Phoenix’s goal to create 25% canopy coverage by 2030 is “ambitious,” Middel said.

Because of factors both environmental and financial, Middel said, the Tree and Shade Master Plan may be more difficult to achieve than city officials had anticipated.

“The city has struggled a lot with increasing the tree canopy,” she said. “A lot of trees are lost every year to storms or microburst monsoon storms that take out these trees. It’s really tough to replace those trees and at the same time to increase tree canopy coverage.”

Middel also cited infrastructure challenges, such as sewer lines and underground power cables, as well as businesses that don't want trees to block their signage.

"It's really tricky for them to find locations where they can plant and maintain those trees," Middel said, noting that shade sails, shelters and bus stops can help increase the amount of shade in the city.

Middel suggested residents and developers need to take it upon themselves to plant trees on private properties in order to reach the canopy coverage goal.

"(Trees) increase biodiversity, they retain stormwater, they help with carbon sequestration and they're just pretty to look at," Middel said. "So it's really great that the city has this program for schools and other institutions to sign up to get funding for tree planting because those are areas that really need the trees desperately."



Some Phoenix neighborhoods have more trees than others, resulting in cooler temperatures and improved walkability. (Photo by [Hunter Fore](https://cronkitenews.azpbs.org/people/hunter-fore/) (<https://cronkitenews.azpbs.org/people/hunter-fore/>)/Cronkite News)

### **What are the qualifications to apply?**

Any public school, nonprofit school or nonprofit organization that provides services to youth can apply for the Canopy for Kids or Shade for Students grants. Grant applicants must be located in the city of Phoenix.

Schools or nonprofits not in a qualified census tract can still apply for grants if 80% or more of their student body receives free or reduced-price lunches.

Communities, neighborhood associations, nonprofits, multifamily residential sites, nonresidential sites and community members may apply for the Community Canopy grant. The project must be located in a qualified census tract within the city.

### **What are application deadlines?**

Applications for the Shade for Students grant opened in September and close in January. Three rounds of application deadlines are as follows:

- Round 1: Oct. 17
- Round 2: Nov. 21

- Round 3: Jan. 9

Applications for both the Community Canopy and Canopy for Kids grants opened in September and close in April. The deadline to apply for round 1 funding was Sept. 12, but deadlines for the remaining rounds are:

- Round 2: Oct. 17
- Round 3: Nov. 21
- Round 4: Jan. 9
- Round 5: Feb. 13
- Round 6: March 19
- Round 7: April 23

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