



**SOCIETY OF MUNICIPAL ARBORISTS ACCREDITATION**  
**FOR URBAN AND COMMUNITY FORESTRY PROGRAMS**  
**FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

Community forestry programs come in many variations, but every well organized and professionally managed program provides a wide array of valuable benefits to community residents and to the world beyond. Evaluating the efficacy of diverse and unique programs can be a challenge. Communicating success stories to local residents and community leaders can be just as challenging—but is vitally important.

The Urban and Community Forestry Program Accreditation offered by the SMA offers every community the opportunity to both evaluate its local program based on objective, professionally developed standards and to communicate to others the value and success of that local program. To learn more, go to [www.urban-forestry.com/sma-accreditation](http://www.urban-forestry.com/sma-accreditation).

To assist those communities that are thinking about the value of accreditation or considering an application for accreditation, the SMA has developed this list of frequently asked questions regarding the accreditation and application process.

**Standard 1: The program must have at least one ISA Certified Arborist on staff, with an ISA Certified Municipal Specialist preferred.**

**Q: How do I become a Certified Arborist or Municipal Specialist?**

A: City foresters and municipal arborists live with many different job duties, job titles, organizational structures, and professional backgrounds from one town to another. The SMA believes that one of the keys to program success is to have a qualified professional on staff. The most reliable way to assess the qualifications of a program's staff is to ensure that one or more people on the staff meet the standards set forth by the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA) to be designated a Certified Arborist or Municipal Specialist. To become certified, applicants must pass a test and meet a few other requirements. Further details regarding the ISA Certification process are available at [www.isa-arbor.com/certification/index.aspx](http://www.isa-arbor.com/certification/index.aspx).

**Q: Who on our staff must become certified?**

A: Please note that this standard can be met by having any member of the program's staff achieve certification. Exams are offered throughout the year, and recertification credits can be earned at conferences and in numerous other ways.

**Standard 2: The program must have a local Forest Management Plan approved by the appropriate local body.**

**Q: Why do we need an urban/community forest management plan?**

A: A community forestry program should have a management plan to provide guidance, clarity, and continuity for the local program. The process of developing a management plan is constructive and

catalytic for most programs, and should not be feared. It is actually a great opportunity to embrace new ideas and to solicit support and feedback from various segments of the organization or the community.

**Q: What does a management plan look like?**

A: Management plans may have various formats and titles. The key is to make sure the plan reflects the goals, objectives, and values of the local community while showing everyone how those goals and objectives are to be achieved. The plan should include the following basic information about the local program.

- a. **Operational goals:** to be established by the local community and staff. In other words, why does the program exist? What work is performed throughout the year?
- b. **Program personnel, equipment, budget, and other resources:** typically established by the community's operating and capital budgets. Every program expends resources to accomplish work. Format is not important as long as you explain how you implement your program. Volunteer time counts.
- c. **Designation of trees for which the municipality is responsible:** this is probably established by your local ordinance or bylaw. Do you manage street trees, park trees, cemetery trees, and/or trees on private property? Most programs manage some combination of the tree populations listed above.
- d. **Continuing care of municipally-owned trees:** applicants should explain how their tree maintenance program works and document that the program is ongoing (annual work cycles etc.). Accredited programs typically exhibit reliability and continuity even as they evolve and change over time.
- e. **Identification and removal of municipally-owned trees:** trees that are beyond their useful or safe lifespan must be felled. What procedures does the community use? How are removal candidates identified (proactive staff inspections, resident calls, etc.)? Does the municipality post signs, send notifications, or utilize a review board or process of some kind? There are not right or wrong answers. Simply explain how your inspection and removal program operates.
- f. **A description of your community's planting work:** does your program offer street trees by request, for a fee, or as replacements for trees removed? Do you use staff or contractors? Do you have diversity goals or a planting plan that you follow? How are sites evaluated? Do you plant bare root, B&B etc.?
- g. **Progress towards education:** do you offer employee training opportunities, public outreach, or other educational materials or programs to remind people of the importance of your program? Your Arbor Day celebration as well as brochures, websites, door hangers, seminars etc. are good examples.
- h. **Enforcement of tree protection ordinances and regulations:** how does your community protect existing trees during construction or development? Do you protect only public trees, or trees on private property as well? Are permits issued? Cite any relevant codes or regulations and briefly explain how you handle this issue. Some communities do more than others in this area, and multiple departments may be involved.
- i. **Inventory and management systems:** do you have a street tree inventory or other management system? Explain your inspection process, documentation, and information/work flow. How do you keep your work organized? What do you know about your urban forest? (A detailed street tree inventory is not an accreditation requirement.)

- j. **Program objectives and future goals:** do you have objectives to improve your program and to better achieve your operational goals listed in (a) above? What could you do to in the future to be more effective? Examples might include completing a street tree inventory, shortening pruning cycles, buying new equipment, or increasing staffing.
- k. **Local plan approval:** approval of the management plan should occur at the most appropriate level for that particular community. In some cities, that may mean approval by the City Council, Board of Selectmen, City Manager, or Mayor. In other towns, it may be more appropriate to approve a plan through a Department Director, the Tree Commission, Planning Board, or Service Committee. The important point is to show that the community and staff have embraced the plan. Attach minutes, a resolution, or a signed plan or memorandum as documentation.

**Standard 3: Program must be a current ADF Tree City USA or equivalent outside the U.S.**

**Q: What does this mean? How do we become a Tree City?**

A: The Arbor Day Foundation works in cooperation with state foresters in the U.S. to recognize communities as a Tree City USA if they meet four annual recognition standards. For further information go to [www.arborday.org/programs/index.cfm](http://www.arborday.org/programs/index.cfm) or contact your state forester's office. If equivalent recognition programs exist outside the U.S., provide documentation of your recognition. Otherwise, communities outside the U.S. should note "not applicable" for this standard. Public agencies other than municipalities that manage urban forests in the U.S. may also note "not applicable" and explain.

**Standard 4: Program must have achieved an ADF Growth Award within the last five years.**

**Q: What does this mean? How do we win a Growth Award?**

A: The Arbor Day Foundation offers Tree City USA communities the chance to win Growth Awards by accomplishing objectives to improve the local urban forestry program. For further information go to [www.arborday.org/programs/index.cfm](http://www.arborday.org/programs/index.cfm) or contact your state forester's office. Again, for communities outside the U.S., this standard is probably "not applicable" unless an equivalent program exists within the country in question. Public agencies other than municipalities that manage urban forests in the U.S. may also note "not applicable" and explain.

**Standard 5: Program must show preference to TCIA Accredited contractors.**

**Q: How do I show preference? Can I get into trouble with my legal or finance departments for doing so?**

A: Accredited community forestry programs should strive to employ qualified professionals if and when contractors are hired. The Tree Care Industry Association offers accreditation to any contractors who meet a 63-point checklist, verified by an on-site audit. Most communities have legal and administrative policies and procedures for bidding and hiring contractors. Local rules should always be followed, and your policy to meet this standard need not be binding on other municipal officials. Meeting Standard 5 can be as simple as stating in your urban forest management plan or contract specifications that a TCIA Accredited firm is preferred, or that in the event of a tie bid, the City Forester will select a TCIA accredited vendor when possible. This strategy can help prevent legal and financial entanglements within your organization. Every community must have a tie-breaker procedure, and the decision in the event of a tie bid is often thrown back to the City Forester/Municipal Arborist anyhow.

**Standard 6: Incorporate ANSI Z-133 safety standards into program.**

**Q What is an ANSI Standard? How do I do that?**

A: In the U.S., the American National Standards Institute publishes peer written standards for various aspects of arboricultural work. The Z-133 standard pertains to safety during tree care operations. Go to [www.isa-arbor.com/store/product.aspx?ProductID=122](http://www.isa-arbor.com/store/product.aspx?ProductID=122) or [www.tcia.org/safety/best-safety-practices-programs](http://www.tcia.org/safety/best-safety-practices-programs) for more information. The standard can be adopted through contract specification language, in your management plan, by ordinance or resolution, or through standard operating procedures documents. Simply document how you have incorporated safety standards into your work. Equivalent safety standards outside the U.S. are acceptable. If no equivalent exists, note “not applicable” and explain how you promote safety.

**Standard 7: Incorporate ANSI A-300 tree care standards into program.**

**Q: What is this? How do I do that?**

A: In the U.S., the American National Standards Institute publishes peer written standards for various aspects of arboricultural work. The A-300 standard pertains to various aspects of tree care operations. Go to [www.isa-arbor.com/store/category.aspx?cid=117](http://www.isa-arbor.com/store/category.aspx?cid=117) or <http://tcia.org/business/ansi-a300-standards> for more information. The standards can be adopted through contract specification language, in your management plan, by ordinance or resolution, or through standard operating procedures documents. Simply document how you have incorporated these professional tree care standards into your work. Equivalent standards outside the U.S. are acceptable. If no technical equivalent exists, note “not applicable” and explain what guides your operations.

**Standard 8: Pledge to adhere to the SMA Code of Ethics and objectives.**

**Q: What is the SMA Code of Ethics? Who is authorized to sign?**

The SMA Code of Ethics is a short list of practices and goals that guides our members strengthens our organization, and promotes professionalism. It can be found at [www.urban-forestry.com/sma-accreditation](http://www.urban-forestry.com/sma-accreditation). Any SMA member affiliated with your program can sign the pledge and attach it to the accreditation application.

Don't forget to fill out all of the contact information on page one at the top of the accreditation application and to sign the end of the application. Submit the application along with your supporting materials and online payment by credit card or check. You will be contacted should the review team have any questions. Once a community is accredited, the SMA will contact you regarding periodic renewal of your accreditation. Accredited programs can recertify online at [www.urban-forestry.com](http://www.urban-forestry.com) as long as they are compliant with the accreditation standards in effect at the time of renewal.