

Tips for Engagement

Planners are exactly the type of allies urban forests need. They think in terms of decades, frequently stay in their positions for long periods of time, and are motivated by health and environmental values. ReLeaf recognizes that nonprofits have time and money constraints, yet also believes local advocacy and working relationships with decision-makers like planners, landscape architects, public works and elected officials are critical for our collective success. Below are several straightforward strategies to work more closely with planners and other city professionals:

“Come talk to us!”

—MUNICIPAL PLANNER IN THE LOS ANGELES REGION

1 START EARLY: Engage planners early in your project and collaborate with them along the way.

2 BE POSITIVE: Start on a good note. Remember your many shared values be quick to recognize their efforts and impact so far.

3 BE SPECIFIC: Come prepared with specific tree recommendations and data to support that choice.

4 MAKE IT RELEVANT: Leverage key planning concerns, like urban heat island, human health impacts, beautification, active transportation and shade. Provide research and resources.

5 LEARN LOCAL POLITICS: Ask a former planner to present to your team about how local planners and city politics work. This kind of local systems and advocacy training is invaluable for any nonprofit professional.

6 DELEGATE: Recruit board members who are active in working with their city or who wish to learn the ropes of doing so.

7 SHOW UP: Attend public meetings of planners and elected officials, and invite them to attend yours.

8 NETWORK: Attend one or two American Planning Association, Urban Land Institute, or American Society of Landscape Architecture meetings each year.

9 CONNECT: Reference new legislation, city plans and goals, recent news, etc. These specific topics can open the door to a bigger conversation about urban trees.

10 MAKE IT EASY: Planners are busy and have many competing priorities. When introducing a project, take as much of the work off their plate as possible.

11 BUILD RELATIONSHIPS: Start small. Set up a system each year to select just one city professional and get to know them better:

- Could be a planner, landscape architect, city manager, sustainability manager, public works engineer, city councilmember.
- Attend their public meetings (or watch online) to get to know their favorite causes or hot issues
- Set up an introductory meeting or invite them out for coffee.
- Invite them to speak at a staff meeting or board meeting or community event.
- Invite them to sit on an advisory committee or a special ad hoc committee.
- Set up a quarterly or bi-annual meeting to “touch base” on projects related to urban trees.
- Become a resource to this professional. Send them research and case studies, help them connect with the community, and ask how you can help them.

