



# Forest Improvement Grant Program

CAP AND TRADE DOLLARS AT WORK FOR ENVIRONMENTAL  
JUSTICE AND CALIFORNIA'S URBAN FORESTS

# Climate Action Now!

SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA



**The Sunset District in San Francisco** is known for its beautiful sunsets overlooking the Pacific Ocean. Sunset boulevard is a major thoroughfare in the city and with ten lanes of busy traffic it produces poor air quality for residents. For years, San Francisco Public Works and Sunset District's County Supervisor received complaints about the lack of maintenance and care of the atrophied trees along the boulevard. Climate Action Now! decided to get involved and convened multiple stakeholders to give the street-- and the environment--a long overdue boost by planting 342 trees that will help mitigate air pollution.

San Francisco Public Works, San Francisco Public Utilities Commission, and five schools partnered with Climate Action Now! to support and fund several aspects of the Sunset Boulevard Reforestation Program along with their grant from CAL FIRE and California. ReLeaf. Beyond direct planting and irrigation updates, education and youth empowerment were key objectives.

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Climate Action Now! created hands-on experiential curricula, in conjunction with an AP Biology teacher, for students to learn about biodiversity, solar design, careers in urban forestry, beekeeping, organic agriculture, and soil building. With field trips and guest speakers, youth became workforce ready to help support the new green infrastructure along eleven blocks, roughly two miles, of the 38 block boulevard. Eleven youth interns earned valuable environmental workforce skills as they learned how to plant and care for a variety of trees and install two biodiversity hubs featuring colorful pollinator plants





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to attract butterflies, hummingbirds, and bees. Those youth also earned \$1000 each as a stipend for their time and effort.

Traditionally, the Sunset District is not thought of as a disadvantaged community due to high property prices; however, many youth who participated as volunteers or interns are considered at a disadvantage. Many were youth of color from nearby neighborhoods and were seeking ways to engage in their community in meaningful ways. The internship program and planting days were not the sole focus for Climate Action Now! Education and after-school enrichment are an integral part of their mission and overall program.



To better support San Francisco's urban canopy, Climate Action Now! organized several community-wide planting days and welcomed over 400 volunteers in their efforts to plant the 342 trees and over 400 plants. Irrigation upgrades were also installed throughout the passageway, too, to ensure proper watering and care. In addition, educating the masses who travel along the boulevard was of the utmost importance. Massive, colorful signage flanked the biodiversity hubs showcasing the work and why it was important to plant the trees and foliage.

Perhaps one of the biggest outcomes of the reforestation program was the excitement that grew due to its overall success. Future funding and partnerships emerged, ensuring that Climate Action Now! can continue--and potentially grow--its youth internship program and become a viable model for other municipality and public utility partnerships. They have been able to prove their capacity as an organization to do more good, especially in tandem with San Francisco Public Works and the Bureau of Urban Forestry. ●



# Sustainable Solano

SOLANO COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

**People experiencing homelessness are rarely afforded the opportunity to live in a safe place where they can grow their own produce.** However, through a partnership with Sustainable Solano, residents at Shelter Solano are reaping the benefits of healthy living and more. Volunteers, residents, and staff have rallied together to create an edible and educational landscape with a permaculture garden and mixed canopy urban forest at Shelter Solano. Aptly named “HOPE” this garden serves as a demonstration food forest in the region, helping showcase simple green innovations that contribute to a cleaner and healthier environment. This is just one of the successful projects undertaken by Sustainable Solano to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and promote ecological regeneration.

For more than 20 years, Sustainable Solano’s mission has been to nurture initiatives that benefit the whole. They are ensuring a sustainable future for Solano County by investing in green infrastructure, supporting the local food system, and offering workforce skill development with youth and other disadvantaged populations. The California Climate Investments grant program allowed Sustainable Solano to provide education classes and a sustainable landscape certification program to Shelter Solano residents. The HOPE garden was improved with pollinator plants, fruit trees, bioswales, and sheet mulching. More importantly, carbon-sequestration trees were planted as a barrier on the campus from neighboring industrial factories and busy railroad tracks. The trees will help to reduce building temperature and clear the air of smelly pollutants that disturb the peace --and health-- of Shelter Solano residents.

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Sustainable Solano also engaged youth from Armijo High School (a Title 1 School). The grassroots organization helped teens learn about the carbon cycle and why planting trees matters. Together, they beautified the campus with much-needed



shade trees where teens eat lunch, hang out, and gather.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, Sustainable Solano didn’t miss a beat. They quickly learned safety protocols, set up a system to keep engaging their volunteers, and followed proper guidelines, social distancing measures, and provided the necessary protection for its team.

All in all, 127 volunteers gave 390 hours at planting events. Sustainable Solano provided on the spot education with them, spending roughly 15-20 minutes teaching about the role of trees. They also created and disseminated a colorful brochure about “Carbon in the Atmosphere” that explained in simple language the importance of choosing the right trees to capture the most carbon. Pruning and watering classes were offered to the community as a way



to help ensure maintenance and care of the new trees and foliage. At the end of the project, volunteers had planted 62 trees, replaced seven trees, and planted another 47 plants between Shelter Solano and Armijo High School.

Beyond the environmental impact of planting pollinators and trees at the two different sites, Sustainable Solano also conducted an urban canopy gap assessment with California ReLeaf and the Vacaville Tree Foundation. This assessment helped inform Sustainable Solano how to grow their green infrastructure program, collaborate with others to expand their impact, and know where larger shade-trees are needed to improve Solano County's tree canopy.

Lastly, three maintenance and irrigation jobs were created from this investment. In line with their mission, Sustainable Solano hired people to do the work from small, local businesses that were owned by people of color. Indeed, Sustainable Solano is truly investing in a sustainable future for all by integrating best environmental practices along with workforce development and education for its most vulnerable populations. ●

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# Tree Pledge

LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

**With over 10 million residents that play and relax at roughly 80 county parks,** Los Angeles needs all the help it could get in providing green spaces that offer plenty of shade, especially in the heat of summer. With its enormous population of people driving and living together, it's imperative that the county reduce air pollutants and increase the coverage of its urban canopy to capture carbon. Disadvantaged neighborhoods in LA suffer from some of the absolute worst air quality in the world and it is people

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and protect trees while addressing environmental justice issues to improve the physical, emotional, social, and economic health of residents in disadvantaged communities

who bear the costly health consequences. Planting shade trees can be a simple solution to offsetting both environmental and human health risks.

Tree Pledge is a social movement that invigorates communities to plant

in Los Angeles County. In collaboration with Los Angeles County Parks and Rec, Los Angeles California Conservation Corps, and The Radical Resilience Lab, they embarked on a pilot project—the Good Shade Program—to reforest Alondra Park with 50 new trees as a long overdue upgrade to its tree canopy.

The Alondra Park community was chosen for its close proximity to the 405 freeway and trucking routes. Toxic air pollutants often contribute to respiratory illnesses and lower-income residents often pay a hefty emotional and economical price to mitigate the damage. Alondra Park in particular, and the surrounding census tract, yield an EnviroScreen score of 86-100% pollution burden. The Good Shade Program hopes that by planting shade trees it will empower residents to get outside, commune with nature, and reap the multitude of health benefits of being outdoors because the parks will be comfortable for recreation or relaxation.

As a new environmental coalition, Tree Pledge's pilot program was a success despite the challenges that came with the COVID-19 pandemic. Members of the Conservation Corps were trained to properly plant and care for the trees



during several carefully planned planting days to account for safety protocols. The team was able to wear special masks and practice social distancing. Norma E. García-González, Director of Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation, was integral to the project, sharing data maps and other urban forestry data and tools to best determine where to improve the canopy. She said, “We are proud to partner with Tree Pledge to bring ‘Good Shade’ to Alondra Park and very-high park need communities in South Los Angeles, where parks are often the only access to

nature, fresh air and physical activity that many households need, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is vital that we invest in disadvantaged communities that are at higher risk of respiratory illness due to lack of trees and shade equity.”

Equity is at the heart of The Tree Pledge as they work collaboratively to improve the health of residents in pockets of the city where the green divide is evident. As a grassroots coalition, this was their first state grant from California ReLeaf which helped them establish the



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necessary resources to make their vision a reality. And by partnering with the Radical Resilience Lab, they were able to reconnect humans to the soil beneath their feet while bringing forth ideas, models, and conversations about what’s possible at the intersection of community health, personal wellness and climate solutions. Alondra Park served as one of these models and Tree Pledge intends to leverage its success and expand its tree planting efforts to nine other Los Angeles Parks in neighborhoods that are burdened with nearly the same toxic air quality. ●



# CALIFORNIA ReLeaf



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*Empowering grassroots efforts and building strategic partnerships that preserve, protect and enhance California's urban and community forests.*

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