DEC's advice for NYS Tree Campus applicants

(Last updated July 2023)

<mark>*APPLICATION DEADLINE IS DECEMBER 1ST, 2023*</mark>

This document is meant to respond to a lot of the common questions and errors that we see in Tree Campus applications. These are our thoughts based on our experience working with the Arbor Day Foundation. ADF sometimes changes their interpretations of their requirements and such, so just keep in mind that this document is not authoritative or exhaustive.

ADF will often return a satisfactory application for edits simply because they didn't find what they needed to see. They are reading through thousands of applications between all their programs, and they don't have nearly enough staff to handle it, so you can make the process go more smoothly for them and for you by making the information they need very easy to find.

(The Tree Campus program is a collaborative effort between states and the Arbor Day Foundation. The applications are first reviewed by a DEC representative, and then by someone with the Arbor Day Foundation.)

We recommend you keep this document open while you fill out your Tree Campus application to help the process go as smoothly as possible. As always, you can reach out to your local DEC regional forester for technical forestry and arboriculture advice, (listed on the DEC Tree City/Campus/Line webpage), or you can contact Matt Viglucci for help with your application at matthew.viglucci@dec.ny.gov *or 518-402-9416.*

Please be mindful that this is the first year the Arbor Day Foundation will be using their new application portal, so things will look different, and we will all be learning together. Give yourselves extra time to complete the application in case things go wrong. If you're having technical difficulties, try to send us a few screenshots when you reach out, and hopefully we will be able to figure out what is going on promptly.

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Signing in to the application portal

Since the portal will be new to everyone this year, make sure you write down any passwords and such, and that anyone else who works on the application with you also has the credentials. I assume it will still be fairly simple for a new individual with an organization to reset the password, but we don't know exactly what it will look like, so just keep track of everything to be prepared. It could also benefit your successors if your position or responsibilities change, or if students are helping with the application.

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Standard 1: Campus Tree Advisory Committee

To fulfill this requirement, you must have a **list of all the members of your campus tree care committee over the last calendar year**, including their title/role on the committee. There must be at least one student, faculty, facilities employee, and "community representative" (someone who lives in the town the campus is located in, who isn't already fulfilling one of those other slots) on the committee.

Also make sure that you have **a list of the committee's meeting dates over the last calendar year.** If ADF doesn't see the dates, or the dates look off (like they aren't from the application calendar year) they will return your application for edits, no doubt.

If your campus has a sustainability committee or something similar, that is completely fine to fulfill this requirement for the Tree Campus application, assuming it has representation from students, faculty, facilities, and the community. Just remember that Arbor Day Foundation is concerned with trees specifically, so they want to know that whatever committee you have, it is the body that discusses trees on your campus.

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Standard 2: Campus Tree Care Plan

This requirement demonstrates to ADF how exactly your campus maintains its trees, who works on them, etc. They do **require that your plan has been written or updated within the last five years, so make sure the date you wrote/updated your plan are clearly visible** at the top of the document.

ADF specifies on their website that they want to at least see the following in a campus tree care plan ([visit their website for more details on each of these](#)):
1. Clearly stated purpose.
2. Responsible authority/department
3. Establishment/designation of a Campus Tree Advisory Committee
4. Campus tree care policies
5. Protection and Preservation policies and procedures
6. Goals and Targets
7. Tree damage assessment
8. Prohibited practices
9. Definitions of terminology related to campus trees
10. Communication strategy

Most Tree Campuses follow this order in their document, which makes it easy for ADF to see that you've fulfilled each component they are looking for. That said, if you're going through the trouble of writing a tree care plan, you should develop one that works for your needs, and following ADF's format

might not make sense for everyone. It's far more important to develop a sound and effective plan, rather than just following a template. **We strongly recommend contacting your local DEC urban forester, listed on DEC's Tree City/Campus/Line webpage, for advice and feedback on your campus tree plan.**

If you're not using ADF's format, make sure that each of those 10 components are spoken for in your document, and that we can find them easily. **We recommend placing comments on your PDF which mark a certain section** as "#5: Protection and Preservation policies" for example.

ADF recommends [this plan from Virginia Tech](#) as an example of a tree care plan they like, if you're interested in borrowing their format.

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Standard 3: Dedicated Tree Budget

This requirement does require some documentation, but exactly how you fulfill it can vary. All you have to do is demonstrate that your organization has money specifically budgeted for tree care on campus. This might be **documents from your bookkeeping department, with certain lines of budget highlighted** so that we can see where the money for trees is located. Or, your **campus tree care plan** logically might contain details about the available budget, which you can then just upload again to the application under Standard 3, but with **highlights over the budget portions**.

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Standard 4: Annual Arbor Day observance

This standard is probably the most common area where applications are lacking, so your application will be in great shape if you get the documentation right here.

First of all, make sure you have an Arbor Day celebration at some point during the calendar year. **It can be any day of the year**, it's okay if it doesn't line up with national Arbor Day (last Friday in April). You can also hold any kind of celebration, including a tree planting ceremony, a volunteer event, a social media campaign like a livestream, and more. ADF is not flexible about the titling of the event though – **an Earth Day event does not count!!** ADF specifically wants to see that you celebrated _trees_ and Arbor Day. It's probably fine if trees were a focus of a specific portion of your Earth Day programming, but your documentation has to clearly describe how the event focused on trees.

You need to **provide evidence of your Arbor Day celebration**, in whatever form it took. This is usually pictures, and a written description of the event with the dates and times recorded. News articles, event advertisements, social media, and things like that are also highly recommended to make sure your application is accepted the first time around.

If your campus participated in another organization's Arbor Day celebration (like the local municipality), that is usually fine to fulfill Standard 4, but the documentation has to explicitly depict your organization's role and involvement in the event.

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Standard 5: Service Learning project

These are the components your service learning project needs to include, and which you need to specify in your documentation of it:
- Tree-focused project
- Students perform some kind of tree-related service for the campus or community
- Students *learn something about trees* through the project
  - Saying that students planted trees on campus isn't enough for ADF, you need to also point out that they were taught proper tree-planting technique, for example

Provide a **description of the project that lays out each of these, and includes the dates the project** occurred (if ADF doesn't see the dates or they are from an older year, they will return your application, guaranteed), as well as pictures, a news article, a social media post, or something similar that provides evidence of the project

Arbor Day Foundation is pretty flexible about what projects are eligible, but **they most commonly reject projects when they aren't clearly focused on trees.** For example, a campus-wide trash clean-up doesn't count for this requirement, because it's not specifically tree-focused. What exactly constitutes "tree-focused" is up to interpretation, so if you can make a case that your service learning project is tree-related, it might pass, but there are no guarantees.