

City of Seattle

Urban Forestry Communication Toolkit

Developed by



Funded by

Seattle Office of Sustainability & Environment

Seattle reLeaf

Seattle Parks and Recreation

Seattle Department of Transportation

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Urban Forestry Communication Toolkit

The purpose of this Urban Forestry Communication Toolkit is to give City of Seattle departments involved with the work of urban forestry common language and approaches to use as they engage and involve residents in the City's goals for increasing the number of trees in Seattle.

The City of Seattle is already a leader in urban forestry. The nonprofit conservation organization American Forests recently named Seattle one of the 10 best cities for urban forests. But much work remains to be done. The City's Urban Forest Stewardship Plan lays out a number of goals around the stewardship, enhancement, and health of Seattle's trees. The ultimate goal is to reach tree canopy cover of 30 percent throughout the city by 2037—the 30th anniversary of the original 2007 plan. As many of the trees in the city are on privately owned single-family and multi-family properties, and many of the strategies for improving the urban forest require public support, effective ways to reach out to and involve residents will be crucial if the Plan's goals are to be achieved.

The task is made somewhat more challenging by the fact that there are eight different City departments with tree-management responsibilities, each of them with widely varying functions. This toolkit includes language that will help City employees evoke the core values of urban forestry work.

The toolkit language is based on recent listening sessions conducted by a group of Tree Ambassadors, retired marketing and communications professionals, who identified people's emotional connection to trees. The work is based on the concepts in Clotaire Rapaille's book *The Culture Code*. We have long known that people most often make decisions and changes based on emotional responses and associations, not hard facts. This understanding of the underlying "culture code" about trees has informed the language in this toolkit.

The Urban Forestry Communication Toolkit was developed by Scheiderer Partners consultants under contract with the City, funded jointly by Seattle reLeaf, the Office of Sustainability & Environment, Seattle Department of Transportation, and Seattle Parks & Recreation. It is based on the culture code listening sessions; on interviews with urban forestry stakeholders from Seattle reLeaf, the Office of Sustainability & Environment, Seattle Department of Transportation, Seattle City Light, and Seattle Parks & Recreation; and was informed by a thorough review of current City communication about urban forestry.

How to use the toolkit

This toolkit is not a script. It is not our intention that you should always repeat the language verbatim. It would be a very long document indeed if we tried to create an exact response to every possible situation! Rather, the toolkit provides some fundamental language and concepts that you can refer to and fall back on as you make the language your own. It provides a basis for talking about urban forestry from residents' point of view, in a way that connects with them, and thus advances your community engagement goals.

Contents of the toolkit

- Audience analysis
- About urban forestry language
- Message framework, platform, and call to action
- Sample messaging, including general language and samples for individual offices and programs

Audience analysis

The first thing to consider when developing a communication strategy is your audience: whom do you want to reach with your messages? The ultimate target audience for these messages is broad, potentially including everyone who lives and works in Seattle. There are clear sub-groups within this larger population:

- Private property owners
- People doing projects that impact trees
- People who have trees on their property that need to be pruned or removed
- People who enjoy parks
- Current and potential volunteers and stewards in various urban forestry initiatives

It's also important to remember who is not in the target audience—and that is City staff. Your target audiences do not have the depth of inside information and knowledge that staff members do, and so the language that resonates with staff might not always resonate with those who aren't involved in urban forestry day in and day out. Their motivations and perceptions are different, and we need to speak to their frame of reference.

About urban forestry language

The listening sessions conducted in advance of the development of this toolkit identified the emotional connections that Seattle residents have to trees as the primary motivating force that will move them to action around urban forestry issues. These connections include: large mature trees inspire a sense of wonder and awe; trees are special for children and lead adults to harken back to their days as children playing among trees; trees feed our imagination, encourage play, and provide comfort. Trees are dependable and enduring. The listening sessions tapped into a strong correlation between trees and grandparents—both can be seen as dependable, indulgent, watching over kids at play. People recall a favorite tree in Grandma’s yard. Tapping into these associations will help us better engage residents and move them to action as stewards of Seattle’s trees.

“Wonder and awe” is the concept; this document will show us how to put that concept into words. The right balance is to evoke with words and images the deeply held positive feelings about trees such as the ones that people shared in the listening sessions.

While this language is intended to be evocative, we also expect that the scientific data and good public policy reasons to support urban forestry will remain in your materials and “fine print.” It’s important information to have to back up the more emotional appeals. But data and facts are not what motivate people to action. People will form their attitudes and take actions based on emotions, on how trees make them feel about themselves and their city. The role of data is to reinforce, back up, and justify their positive attitudes about trees and their choices to take stewardship action.

The message framework

The message framework we have developed for this toolkit consists of three components:

First it establishes the frame. We describe trees in a way that appeals to the emotions and values of Seattle residents as shared in the listening sessions.

Then it relates that frame to the audience in a specific way. It explains why residents should care about the preservation and growth of the urban forest.

Finally, the framework includes messages intended to invite people to take action.

Establish the frame

Seattle's trees are what make our city the Emerald City.

Awe-inspiring trees are part of the heritage, character, and appeal of our city.

Trees are deeply meaningful to people and help create enchanting places in the city.

What it means for Seattle residents

Trees make our lives better by providing places for play, rest, and reverie.

Trees spark our imagination and create peaceful places for breaks from our everyday hustle and bustle.

Kids of all ages find delight, joy, and wonder in trees.

Call to action

Trees need a little loving care from us.

Taking care of trees will ensure that we, and our grandchildren, can enjoy the beauty and splendor of great old trees.

You can take simple steps to preserve and protect trees in our city.

Sample messaging

Let's look at some general sample messaging. Later we'll look at some messages tailored specifically for different departments.

Elevator speech

Awe-inspiring trees are an important part of Seattle's heritage and character. We are committed to protecting the city's trees and planting new trees that will delight us and evoke fond memories. We carry out our work with an eye toward preserving the city's trees for our grandchildren and ourselves.

Talking points

We want to preserve the city's trees, replace the ones that die, and plant lots of new trees for us and our grandchildren to enjoy.

Children love trees. They are great spots for explorers and pirates and dreamers, hidden away in their tree houses; for swings, birdhouses, and secret camps.

Trees are part of the heritage, character, and appeal of Seattle. Old-growth parks, tree-lined boulevards, and woody neighborhoods spark wonder and fuel the imagination.

Trees are places for play, rest, and reverie.

I remember climbing in this huge, old oak tree at my grandparents' house. I want to make sure my grandkids can enjoy delightful old trees like that, too.

Here is a list of key words and concepts to stress, and words to use with caution when communicating with Seattle residents about urban forestry.

Words to lean into	Words to lighten up on
<p>Wonder</p> <p>Enchantment</p> <p>Awe</p> <p>Majestic</p> <p>Splendor</p> <p>Imagination</p> <p>Delight</p> <p>Joy</p> <p>Transport (as in being transported to a good place or feeling)</p> <p>Play</p> <p>Comfort</p> <p>Preserve</p> <p>Steward</p> <p>Home</p> <p>Fun</p> <p>Green (to describe how lush and colorful Seattle is)</p>	<p>Horticulture</p> <p>Canopy</p> <p>Carbon sequestration</p> <p>CO2 absorber</p> <p>Storm water</p> <p>Green (in the sense of “environmentalism”)</p> <p>Sustainability</p> <p>Environmental/environmentalism</p> <p>Neighborhood enhancer</p> <p>Heat island</p> <p>Utility bills</p> <p>Vegetation</p>

Losing sight of the forest for the trees

In our initial round of feedback about the toolkit language there was some give and take about the use of the word “forest.” On the one hand, some responders expressed concern that forest can sometimes be a negative term; it’s a place where you get lost, where monsters live, and where grumpy trees might pelt you with apples if you pick one. On the other hand, “urban forestry” is the term of art for this work, which in the City is undertaken by the Urban Forestry Interdepartmental Team. There’s an Urban Forest Stewardship Plan, and the Urban Forestry Commission. It would be challenging to strike the word “forest” from our communication.

We suggest that it makes sense to focus on the trees rather than the forest. The words forest, urban forest, and urban forestry can be used sparingly, mainly in reference to the Plan or to official groups and organizations involved in the work. We want to ask residents of Seattle to care not for the whole urban forest (which is daunting, and your task as staff), but to be stewards of trees in their own yards, on their own streets, or in local parks; and to convince them of the worthiness of preserving trees.

Images

The messaging about trees happens as much in what we show as in what we say. The connection between children and trees is strong, the awe and wonder are built largely on fond childhood memories of trees, and thus photos of kids playing in trees, enjoying trees, and having fun planting trees will help make that connection. Photos with children and their grandparents enjoying trees are especially powerful.

This is not to say that just any photo of children will do. The children, or any people in the photograph, should be having positive, emotional interactions with the trees, and each other, rather than just smiling at the camera. They should be actively engaged in the awe and wonder of the tree. Images of children could be negative; you don’t want to depict them out with a crew pruning trees away from power lines, for example. And all photos that include people should show them having fun, not doing work.

Children are not the only good subject for photos. Use photos of mature, healthy trees, and avoid images of young trees or sick ones. Emphasize mature trees, spectacular wooded parks, tree-lined streets, and fall colors.

While images of tree problems, such as ivy-infested or poorly pruned trees, are going to be useful as you delve into the work, these should be avoided as much as possible in communication aimed at outreach. It may seem counter-intuitive to avoid displaying the problems you are trying to solve. However, for most people, it is more inspiring and motivating to portray a positive vision of how healthy and wonderful the urban forest can be.

Some samples specific to programs and offices

Seattle Parks & Recreation

Elevator Speech

Seattle Parks & Recreation is responsible for taking care of something special and splendid: the trees in the City's 6,200 acres of parks and natural areas. We work to preserve the trees we can, and when a tree dies and has to be removed we plant two new ones that we, and our children and grandchildren, will love and enjoy. We help a large and dedicated group of volunteers care for Seattle's awesome trees.

Website Copy

Since 1994, Seattle Parks has been at work enhancing the beauty, wonder, and safety of our publicly owned urban forest. City parks cover approximately 10 percent of Seattle's land, and much of that area is wooded, in both formal and natural park landscapes. The goal of our Urban Forest Restoration Program is to preserve Seattle's trees and protect their health in the parks, so that they will be there to inspire awe and wonder for everyone now and in the future.

Social Media Posts

Twitter

Preserve the splendor of Seattle's trees! Sign up to pull invasive ivy Saturday at Lincoln park {signup URL}

Trees are a valuable and awe-inspiring asset for Seattle! Taking care for them now will preserve wonderful places to play and relax.

X park has beautiful, majestic, awe-inspiring trees that need your help. Sign up today to help preserve these historical wonders.

Facebook

Seattle has many awesome, wooded parks, and our great volunteers help preserve the splendor! On Saturday these 20 volunteers had a great time helping us clear 150 bags full of ivy and several trees that fell in the Duwamish Head Greenspace during last week's windstorm. Volunteers put in more than 100,000 hours in Seattle Parks last year to help keep our marvelous trees healthy, thriving, and inspiring. Sign up to care for trees today! {photo} {link}

E-news or blog post

Seattle is doing a great job at taking care of its majestic, awe-inspiring trees! We were recently named by the nonprofit organization American Forests as one of the top 10 cities in the US for urban forests.

We are proud of our commitment to protecting the health of trees in the city today and planting new ones that our grandchildren will enjoy tomorrow. Continued stewardship will help us preserve the splendor of the city's trees and keep us on the top-10 list for generations to come.

Seattle Department of Transportation

Elevator Speech

While the primary job of Seattle Department of Transportation is to make sure that people can get around the city safely and efficiently, we're also responsible for the care and maintenance of 40,000 street trees in the City's right-of-way. Our aim is to protect the beautiful, majestic trees we have and to plant more—up to 800 each year—so that we keep marvelous tree-lined streets that we love today and our grandchildren will enjoy in the future.

Website Copy

The Urban Forestry section of the Seattle Department of Transportation improves the beauty and character of the city by taking care of the awesome trees along city streets and right-of-ways. This makes our streets safer and more beautiful, and makes Seattle's neighborhoods and businesses more welcoming.

We share the City's overall goals for maintaining and preserving awe-inspiring trees. With funds provided by the Bridging the Gap Levy passed by voters in 2006 we preserve existing trees, manage removals of unsafe or dying trees, and encourage residents and businesses to plant new trees. We also ensure that new developments comply with codes requiring tree planting and landscaping so that our streets remain safe and beautiful.

Social Media Posts

Twitter

Check out our Community Tree Program to see how we're planting wonder in your neighborhood. {link} Your neighbors and grandkids will thank you!

Winter is the perfect time for pruning trees to help them find their future awe-inspiring shape. Check our guide to learn how to do it right! {link}

Nominate a special tree in your neighborhood for our Heritage Tree List {link} Keep great trees around for our grandchildren to enjoy

Facebook

This 100-foot-tall giant sequoia is one of 200 on our Heritage Tree list. Tell us the story of your favorite tree memory, and visit our website to learn how to nominate your tree for the list and make sure it's there for your grandchildren to enjoy. {photo} {link}

E-news or blog

Bring a little wonder to your neighborhood by planting an awesome street tree! It's easy, and Seattle Department of Transportation can help you do it right. Apply for a free permit and our arborists will help you pick an appropriate tree, find the best place

to plant it, and give tips for its care once it's in the ground. Plant a tree today for your grandchildren to enjoy.

Seattle City Light

Elevator Speech

Seattle City Light's job is to keep the lights on. We make sure electricity is safely available to every home and business in the city. To do that we must occasionally trim or remove trees that are a threat to power lines. We do this in a way that preserves trees and replaces ones that have to come down; we share the City's commitment to nurturing the awe-inspiring trees that we all enjoy.

Website Copy

The Vegetation Management division at Seattle City Light is committed to ensuring safe and reliable power delivery through the comprehensive and environmentally responsible management of the trees near our power lines and infrastructure. We share the City's appreciation of its awe-inspiring trees and are committed to preserving the marvelous trees we all enjoy.

Social Media Posts

Twitter

A guide to how @SEACityLight prunes trees {link} Standards set to keep power flowing, protect our awesome trees

Everything you want to know about trees and power lines {link to FAQ} How we keep power on and protect trees

Download "The Right Tree Book" {link} Our guide to choosing an awe-inspiring tree

Facebook

If we left one of our door hangers {photo} at your house, it means that Seattle City Light will be around to trim trees that may be a threat to power lines. Contact us as soon as possible if you have questions or concerns; our standards and procedures protect the power lines and treat your trees well so you can continue to enjoy them. {link}

E-news or blog post

Seattle City Light was recently recognized as a "Tree Line USA Utility" by the Arbor Day Foundation in recognition of our use of best practices for protecting the trees in our service area. We share the City's overall goal of preserving and protecting the city's awesome trees, and planting more trees that we, and our grandchildren, will enjoy. In the cases when a tree has to be removed, we can often replace it as part of Seattle reLeaf's Trees for Neighborhoods program.

There are a lot of power lines in the city; we inspect each circuit about every three years to look for trees and other vegetation that may pose a threat to the grid. Visit our

website {link} to learn more about how we care for Seattle's trees and keep the lights on.

Seattle reLeaf

Elevator speech

Seattle reLeaf is the central point for information about City departments and offices with responsibilities for tree management. Our goal is to keep the Emerald City full of the majestic trees we are known for; we are committed to protecting Seattle's awe-inspiring trees and planting new trees that our grandchildren will love and enjoy. Seattle residents planted 1,000 trees last year through our Trees for Neighborhoods program, and our Tree Ambassadors share their fondness for trees with other residents of Seattle.

Website copy

Seattle earned the nickname "The Emerald City" because of the greenery of the trees on our hills and shores. Soaring Douglas firs, mighty cedars, stately maples, and other magnificent trees are a part of the heritage and appeal of our city. Our old-growth parks, tree-lined boulevards, and woodsy neighborhoods fuel the imagination. Trees are great spots for explorers and pirates and dreamers, hidden away in their tree houses; for swings, birdhouses, and secret camps. Trees create havens of beauty for play and rest and make our city more livable.

Taking care of today's trees and planting new ones for tomorrow will preserve the splendor of our trees for the enjoyment of ourselves and our grandchildren.

Social media posts

Twitter

Love a tree? Tell the world! Become a Seattle Tree Ambassador {link} Lead tree walks and share the wonder

See and learn about amazing trees in Seattle's Volunteer Park {link} Tree Walk w/ Tree Ambassadors Feb 22

Plant wonder in your yard. {link} Free trees through our Trees for Neighborhoods program

Plant two trees and you've made a spot for a hammock!

Facebook

With a little TLC your favorite tree will bring you pleasure and wonder for years to come! Pruning is important, and winter is a perfect time to do it! Learn how on our website, and download the tree pruning guide from the Seattle Department of Transportation.

E-news or blog post

Congratulations, Seattle! Last year through our Trees for Neighborhoods program you planted more than 1,000 trees throughout the city. That's a thousand spots for tree houses, swings, and hammocks for all of us, and our grandchildren, to enjoy.

Would you like free trees? Write to treesforneighborhoods@seattle.gov and we'll add you to our email list to keep you up-to-date about Trees for Neighborhoods and let you know when applications open for the program in August. {Link to Trees for Neighborhoods}

Seattle Office of Sustainability & Environment

Elevator Speech

The Office of Sustainability & Environment develops policies and promotes green initiatives for the City of Seattle. We partner across City departments to champion smart practices that solve pressing environmental challenges. This includes work as one of eight different departments with responsibilities for the City's urban forestry goals of protecting today's trees and planting new ones for our grandchildren to enjoy.

Website Copy

Trees are an important part of Seattle's built and natural environment. Old-growth parks, tree-lined boulevards, and woody neighborhoods are a big part of the heritage and appeal of the city. Our goals are simple: preserve today's awe-inspiring trees, replace the ones that die, and plant lots of new trees for us and our grandchildren to enjoy.

Trees are more than just spots for swings, playhouses, and secret camps; they promote social, economic, and environmental health by capturing and slowing rain; filtering air pollution; providing food and habitat; and contributing to the character and beauty of our neighborhoods and business districts.

Social Media Posts

Twitter

RT @reLeafSeattle Become a Seattle Tree Ambassador {link} Lead tree walks, adopt a street tree, preserve trees for future generations

With your help, we planted more than 3,200 trees in Seattle last year, thanks to residents, volunteers, @reLeafSeattle @SeattleDOT @SeattleParks Join us {link}

Facebook

Share the joy and wonder of your favorite trees! Volunteer for our Tree Ambassadors program {photo and link}

E-news or blog post

Calling all tree lovers! Preserve the wonder: adopt a street tree, or spread the word about why you love the city's awesome trees so much.

The City of Seattle's reLeaf Program is looking for new Tree Ambassadors, valued volunteers who nurture Seattle's trees and have the opportunity to attend a variety of fun and informative workshops on topics like pruning, tree identification, and community engagement. Tree Ambassadors also get opportunities for unique experiences like learning to climb trees with professional rigging and tours of local botanic treasures.