

COMMUNITY TREE PROGRAMS IN ILLINOIS, U.S.: A STATEWIDE SURVEY AND ASSESSMENT

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Abstract. This article reports the combined results of two surveys of Illinois, U.S., communities about the status and needs of their community tree programs. The surveys were intended primarily to help state and federal agencies and private organizations to more effectively target the support they give to Illinois community tree programs. In 1995, we surveyed individuals responsible for tree care activities in small Illinois communities (population less than 25,000), and in 1999 we extended the survey to communities with populations of 25,000 or greater. Local municipal officials, regardless of community size, have strong positive attitudes toward the value of trees to their communities. Communities vary, however, in their resources, problems, and needs relating to their public trees. In particular, small communities often lack key components of an effective tree program and trained personnel for carrying out these programs. In providing assistance for community tree programs, state, federal, and private organizations should keep in mind the distinct needs and opportunities of communities of different sizes.

Key Words. Urban and community forestry; tree program; tree ordinance; survey research; small town.

According to the 1998 Place Population Estimates from the U. S. Census Bureau, 89% of Illinois' 11.4 million residents live in the state's 1,290 incorporated communities (U. S. Census Bureau 2002). Ninety-five percent of those communities have populations less than 25,000, accounting for 33% of Illinois' population. The landscapes of most of these Illinois communities are dominated by trees. The economic, ecological, and aesthetic benefits of community trees to the public are substantial and well-documented (Getz et al. 1982; Schroeder and Cannon 1983; Dwyer et al. 1991, 1992; Schroeder 1991; Hull 1992; Schroeder and Ruffolo 1996). It is important that these trees be managed properly to sustain the health of the urban forest and provide the greatest benefits to residents (Miller 1997).

This article reports the combined results of two surveys about the status and needs of Illinois communities' tree management programs. The surveys were intended primarily to help state and federal agencies and private organizations to more effectively target the support they give to Illinois community tree programs. In 1995, we surveyed

small Illinois communities (population less than 25,000) about their programs for managing public shade and street trees (Green et al. 1998). This survey was unique in that it obtained information about the smallest Illinois communities and about community officials' attitudes toward their community's trees. In 1999, we extended the survey to include Illinois communities with populations of 25,000 or greater (Green et al. 2002).

Previous urban forestry surveys were conducted in Illinois in 1981 (Illinois Department of Conservation 1981) and 1988 (Stewart 1988). The 1988 survey included useful information about trees from municipalities, park districts, forest preserve districts, utility companies, and green-industry companies. It did not, however, identify the attitudes of municipal officials toward the value of their community forests, what they felt the role of government should be in supporting community tree programs, or what type of assistance they most needed to initiate or further develop such programs.

Similar urban forestry surveys have been conducted outside Illinois. Two national surveys (Kielbaso et al. 1988; Tschantz and Sacamano 1994) have provided baseline data and insight into the status and needs of the trees within municipal forests, particularly in the more highly populated communities. However, those surveys did not provide much data on tree programs from the smallest size communities, especially those with populations less than 2,500. A survey in Connecticut (Ricard 1994) did include information both about the attitudes of the respondents and about trees in small communities.

Based in part on Ricard's (1994) study in Connecticut, our surveys sought information on

1. municipal officials' attitudes about the values of public trees
2. their attitudes concerning the role of municipal and state government in supporting community tree programs
3. the current status and needs of their tree programs
4. the type of technical assistance they feel will most benefit their communities

The present article highlights the main findings that emerged from analysis of the combined responses to both our surveys, comparing the characteristics of tree programs across communities of different sizes.

METHODS

Questions relating to municipal officials' attitudes toward trees and tree programs were based on questions from Ricard's (1994) Connecticut survey. Since our first questionnaire was directed at small communities, several questions or portions of the questions needed to be modified in the second survey to make them relevant to communities with populations greater than 25,000. However, the large-community survey was designed in such a way that direct comparisons between small and large communities could be made for most of the questions. Both the small- and the large-community surveys included a cover letter from the chief forester of the Illinois Division of Forest Resources explaining the purpose for the survey, describing how the information generated would benefit community tree programs, and encouraging a response.

In June 1995, the small-community survey was mailed to the chief elected official in each of the 1,212 small communities in Illinois. This official was requested to give the survey to the person who had responsibility for tree care activities in the community. Two weeks after the initial mailing, a reminder postcard was sent to nonrespondents. A second complete mailing was sent out to those still not responding two weeks later, followed again by one last reminder postcard two weeks after that. The second survey was sent in February 1999 to all 79 Illinois communities with populations greater than 25,000 that were not included in the 1995 survey. Where the name and address of the municipal forester or arborist were known, the survey was sent directly to that person. In those communities where a municipal forester was not known, the survey was sent to the chief local elected official. A reminder postcard and second mailing of the survey were sent as before. A phone call was made to any municipality still not responding after the second mailing.

Responses from both the surveys of Illinois communities were entered into computer text files and then merged into a single database. From this combined database, separate data files were created for each survey question and imported into the SYSTAT statistical analysis program, which was used to tabulate data and calculate summary statistics for each question. To ensure the most accurate tests of statistical significance across population size groups, Monte Carlo estimates of exact, nonparametric test statistics were calculated using the STATXACT statistical program. Kruskal-Wallis tests were used for yes-no and checklist responses, Jonckheere-Terpstra tests were used for rating scale responses, and ANOVA tests were used for numerical responses. In all cases, a P-value criterion of .05 was used to judge the statistical significance of differences across population groups.

To compare responses across community sizes, communities were classified into the seven size

categories shown in Table 1, based on the U.S. Census population estimates for the year preceding the year in which they filled out the survey (1994 for the small communities and 1998 for the large communities). Wherever the same questions had been used on both surveys, the analysis was performed across the entire set of responding communities. In some cases, responses to two or more questions on one of the surveys were merged to yield a response that would be comparable to the other survey. For example, small communities were asked if they had a tree inventory, while large communities were asked in separate items if they had a total tree inventory or a statistical tree inventory. Responses to these two items on the large-community survey were merged for comparison with the single response from the small-community survey.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Response Rates

A total of 636 communities responded to the two surveys: 579 to the small-community survey in 1995 and 57 to the large-community survey in 1999. The overall response rate was 49% for the two surveys (Table 1). The response rate in the large-community survey was substantially higher (77%) than in the small-community survey (48%). The higher response rate from large communities is probably due to two factors: (1) the person responding to the survey in large communities was more likely to be an urban forester or arborist who had a professional interest in the topic of the survey, and (2) personal phone contacts were made with the large communities who did not respond to the initial mailing to encourage them to complete and return the survey.

In large communities, the survey was most likely to be filled out by a city or village forester/arborist (46%). In small communities, the survey was most likely to be filled out by the chief local elected official, either the mayor or the village board president (46%). This finding may reflect the fact that small communities are less likely to have a city forester or other employee with specialized training in tree care. (Only

Table 1. Size categories of communities responding to the surveys and their response rates. Categories 1 through 4 are from the 1995 small-community survey. Categories 5 through 7 are from the 1999 large-community survey.

Population	Number of Illinois communities	Number of responding communities	Response rate (%)
Less than 2,500	867	369	43
2,500-4,999	125	64	51
5,000-9,999	111	70	63
10,000-24,999	111	76	68
25,000-49,999	50	36	72
50,000-99,999	18	16	89
100,000 or greater	6	5	83
Total	1,288	636	49

8% of communities with populations under 25,000 had a city forester or arborist, as compared to 72% of communities with population 25,000 or greater.)

Attitudes Toward Community Trees and Tree Programs

Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they believed public trees provided several different kinds of benefits to their community. The responses show that tree program managers from communities of all sizes have strong positive attitudes toward the value of community trees. Virtually all of the respondents said they felt that trees improve the appearance of a community, and over 90% agreed that trees are also important for maintaining a healthy environment and for enhancing residents' quality of life. Fewer, but still a majority (78%), of the respondents agreed that trees can help attract customers to business districts.

Respondents were asked whether they thought municipal governments should fund various aspects of community tree programs. The removal of hazardous public trees received the greatest support (86%). There was also strong support (80%) for spending municipal funds on trees to beautify the community. Municipal funding for trees to enhance the economy and to improve environmental health received less support (70% and 73%, respectively), especially from the smaller communities. Even so, a majority of the respondents agreed that municipal funds should be spent for these purposes. In regard to the state government providing personnel and technical assistance to help develop and maintain community tree programs, a majority (75%) agreed or strongly agreed that the state should provide such services.

Overall, the largest communities in the sample showed greater support for using municipal funds for managing public trees than the smaller communities. This difference may reflect the greater difficulty that smaller communities have in finding sufficient funds to carry out tree management activities.

The pattern of responses to the attitude questions regarding benefits of community trees, municipal funding of community tree programs, and state government assistance

to community tree programs closely paralleled the responses to similar attitude questions on Ricard's (1994) survey of urban and community forestry programs in Connecticut.

Status of Community Tree Programs

Tree Boards and Ordinances. Over 80% of the responding communities said they do not have a tree board or commission. Larger towns were more likely to have tree boards or commissions than smaller towns, but even for the largest communities, less than half had a tree board (Table 2).

While 95% of the large communities that responded had a shade or street tree ordinance, only 32% of the smaller communities had a tree ordinance (Table 2). The provisions most often included in an ordinance were site requirements for planting public trees (e.g., parkway width, distance from intersections and overhead utilities) and a list of recommended species, while provisions giving the community authority to require removal of diseased and hazardous trees on private property were less often included (Table 3). Small communities were more likely than large communities to lack these provisions in their ordinance.

Information on Numbers of Public Trees. Only 20% of communities have a tree inventory (Table 2), and fewer still (11%) have updated tree inventories. Small communities are significantly less likely than large communities to have a tree inventory, and if they do have a tree inventory, they are less likely to keep it updated.

On average, responding communities of all sizes reported planting 2.7 new trees for every tree they removed during the 2 years preceding the survey. Small communities actually had a higher ratio of trees planted to trees lost (3.8 trees planted for each tree removed) than did large communities (2.5 trees planted for each tree removed).

Responsibility and Training for Public Tree Care. In 60% of the responding communities, there is a municipal department or employee with assigned responsibility for public tree care (Table 2). Large towns are significantly more likely (100%) than small towns (44%) to have someone with assigned responsibility for public trees.

Table 2. The percentage of responding communities in Illinois having four components of a tree management program.

Tree management program component	Community size/10 ³ (%)							All	Kruskal-Wallis test
	<2.5	2.5–5.0	5.0–10.0	10.0–25.0	25.0–50.0	50.0–100.0	>100.0		
Tree commission or board	8	26	26	33	38	50	40	18	64.0*
Street or shade tree ordinance	16	46	57	80	92	100	100	38	217.6*
Tree inventory	12	11	24	28	67	47	60	20	18.0*
Department/employee responsible for public trees	44	63	74	93	100	100	100	60	116.9*

*Differences between population size groups significant at $p < 0.05$, using Monte Carlo estimates of exact Kruskal-Wallis test statistic.

A city or community forester or arborist is the individual most likely to have principal responsibility for public tree care in large communities, while in the small communities this responsibility is most likely to be handled by a public works director or a street superintendent. Few small Illinois communities have a separate forestry department. Many of these communities are so small that they don't even have official departments, and may only have one or two full-time municipal employees. In small communities that have assigned tree care responsibilities to a municipal employee, this person often has other duties that take up a greater portion of his or her work time. Typically, the municipal employee with assigned responsibility for public tree management and care in a small community spends less than 25% of his or her work time on this task. In large communities, on the other hand, the person responsible for public tree care is likely to spend 50% or more of his or her time on working with the community's trees.

In the majority of small Illinois communities, the person responsible for making decisions about community trees lacks arboriculture- or forestry-related higher education, certification, workshop training, or experience in the tree care profession (Table 4). In large communities, the responsible person is most likely to have a college degree in a field related to tree care, to be an ISA Certified Arborist, and to

have attended tree care workshops. In the small communities, less than 7% of the municipal employees responsible for public trees are ISA Certified Arborists or Certified Tree Workers. By contrast, in 61% of large communities, the employee with principal responsibility for trees has at least one of these certifications.

Municipal employees in small communities may gain some knowledge of tree management and care through attendance at workshops, through a commercial tree service, or by on-the-job experience. However, one of the most disturbing findings of this survey was that in 63% of the responding small communities, the person with principal responsibility for public tree management had no formal tree care training.

Provision of Public Tree Services. The survey asked which of a list of tree services are provided to the community and by whom (Table 5). Tree removal and storm cleanup were the most frequently provided public tree care services, most likely because they relate to public safety. These services are provided in over 90% of the responding small communities and in all of the large communities. Storm cleanup is most often performed by municipal employees, while tree removal is performed about equally often by municipal employees and private contractors.

Table 3. Percentage of responding communities in Illinois having various provisions included in their street tree ordinances.

Tree ordinance provision	Community size/10 ³ (%)							All	Kruskal-Wallis test
	< 2.5	2.5–5.0	5.0–10.0	10.0–25.0	25.0–50.0	50.0–100.0	>100.0		
List of recommended species	45	77	81	79	84	86	80	73	21.56*
Site requirements for planting trees	70	84	92	84	87	93	80	83	5.884
Removal of diseased trees on private property	30	40	61	60	74	75	60	54	20.81*
Removal of hazard trees on private property	36	37	66	60	70	73	80	55	18.81*

*Differences between population size groups significant at p < 0.05, using Monte Carlo estimates of exact Kruskal-Wallis test statistic.

Table 4. Percentage of responding communities in Illinois having an employee with various levels of training responsible for public tree management and care.

Employee's level of training	Community size/10 ³ (%)							All	Kruskal-Wallis test
	< 2.5	2.5–5.0	5.0–10.0	10.0–25.0	25.0–50.0	50.0–100.0	>100.0		
College or technical degree	3	3	17	14	39	81	80	15	65.94*
ISA certification	0	8	12	17	50	75	100	15	96.42*
Other training	19	23	73	65	97	94	80	47	118.5*
No training	81	73	37	39	6	6	0	55	107.2*

*Differences between population size groups significant at p < 0.05, using Monte Carlo estimates of exact Kruskal-Wallis test statistic.

Table 5. Percentage of responding communities in Illinois providing various tree-related services.

Type of tree service provided	Community size/10 ³ (%)							All	Kruskal-Wallis test
	<2.5	2.5–5.0	5.0–10.0	10.0–25.0	25.0–50.0	50.0–100.0	>100.0		
Planting	75	83	80	97	100	100	100	81	29.78*
Water/mulch	64	73	81	80	89	100	100	72	26.79*
Prune on request	78	83	86	96	94	100	100	83	21.40*
Cyclic pruning	54	52	73	86	89	94	80	63	41.80*
Pest control	48	47	59	66	81	81	20	53	17.56*
Removal	87	95	97	100	100	100	100	92	26.15*
Storm cleanup	92	97	97	100	100	100	100	94	15.09*
Education	35	38	56	59	89	88	80	45	53.68*
Recycling	52	59	87	89	83	94	100	64	68.81*

*Differences between population size groups significant at $p < 0.05$, using Monte Carlo estimates of exact Kruskal-Wallis test statistic.

Tree planting and pruning on request are the next most often provided public tree care services (81% and 83%, respectively). Both planting and pruning on request are provided most often by municipal employees, although private contractors also play a substantial role. Community volunteers are involved in planting trees in 28% of the small communities, but their involvement in the tree programs of larger communities is limited. Twenty percent of the small communities indicated they do not provide any tree planting services, while all of the large communities said that they do provide tree planting.

Cyclic pruning, landscape waste recycling services, pest control, and community education are less commonly provided tree services and are all provided more often in large communities than in small communities (Table 5).

Communities with Active Tree Programs.

For the purposes of this study, communities with active tree programs are defined as those that provide tree planting, watering, and mulching; that have a tree ordinance; and have either a tree board/commission or a department/employee assigned responsibility for public trees. Only 28% of the responding communities met all of the criteria for having an active tree program. There was a large difference between small and large communities: 2% of small communities having active tree programs, while 89% of large communities had active programs (Figure 1). Small communities usually provided tree planting, watering, and mulching services but lacked tree ordinances, tree boards, and individuals or departments with assigned responsibility for public trees.

Problems and Assistance Needs

To help state and federal agencies, as well as private organizations, target their assistance programs on the areas of

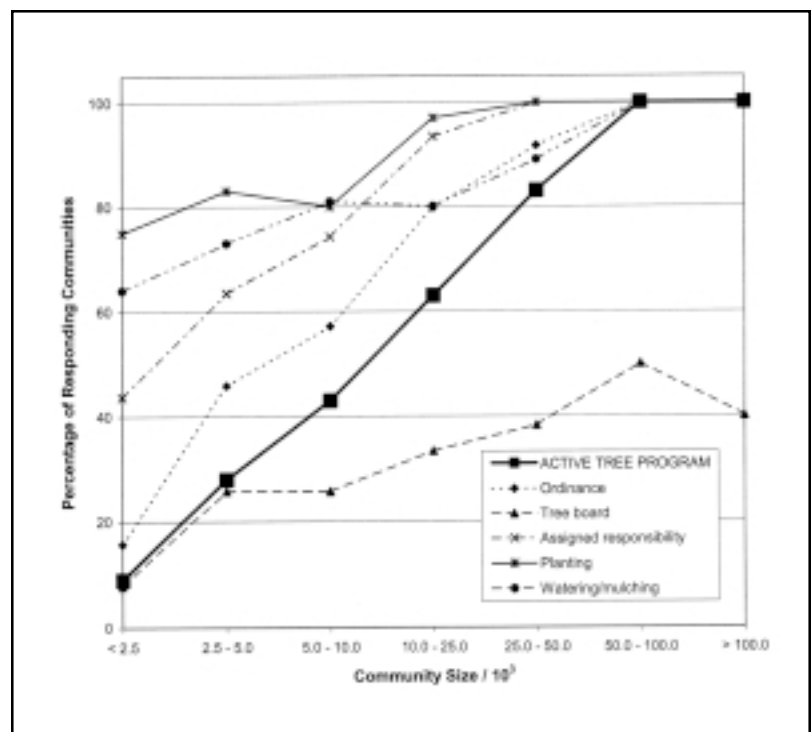


Figure 1. Percentage of responding communities with components of an active tree program. A community is considered to have an active tree program if it provides tree planting, watering, and mulching; has a tree ordinance; and has either a tree board/commission or a department/employee assigned responsibility for public trees. The heavy line in the graph indicates the percentage of communities that satisfy this definition.

greatest need, the survey sought information from municipalities on specific problems they were having with their trees, the types of assistance they would like to receive for their tree programs, and their awareness of and experience with state and federal grant programs.

Almost half of the responding communities stated that they are aware of certain common problems with their trees. Large communities were more likely than small

communities to report being aware of such problems. The most frequently reported problem for communities of all sizes was trees growing into utility lines. The next most frequently mentioned problems were hazardous trees and insects/diseases.

Several of the problem types differed significantly across the size groups. Loss of trees to construction and development was a greater problem in large than in small communities. Insects and disease appeared to be of most concern in medium-sized communities, while poor survival of newly planted trees and lack of community officials' support for tree planting appeared to be of greater concern in both the smallest and the largest communities.

During the years covered by the surveys, several state and federal grant programs were available to assist community tree programs. Such grant funds could be especially useful for smaller communities, which often lack the resources to support an active tree program. Yet it appears that small communities in Illinois are less likely to obtain the benefits of these grants than are the larger municipalities. In most small communities, especially those with populations less than 5,000, the person responsible for public trees was not aware of state and federal grant funding opportunities—despite the fact that the state had sent information on its grant program to all Illinois communities. Large communities were much more likely than small communities to have applied for a grant. Among communities that did apply for grants, the larger communities were more likely to have been awarded the grant they applied for—even though the state had adopted procedures to ensure that at least some smaller communities would be funded. A possible explanation for this finding is that lack of expertise and experience in preparing proposals and in administering funded projects makes small communities hesitant to apply for grants and less able to write effective proposals when they do apply.

Two-thirds of Illinois communities responding to the survey indicated they would like assistance to initiate or further develop their local tree program. The most frequently desired type of assistance was help in applying for community forestry grant funds. A large number of the communities also desired periodic free access to a trained community forester; training workshops for employees or volunteers in proper tree selection, planting, and care; and assistance in conducting tree inventories. Somewhat fewer communities, but still a substantial number, requested assistance in identifying hazardous trees and in drafting a tree ordinance. Generally, small communities were more likely than large communities to desire assistance with drafting a tree ordinance, identifying hazardous trees, and applying for grant funds.

CONCLUSIONS

The communities of Illinois span the entire range from tiny rural villages to major urban centers. This survey demon-

strated that Illinois municipal officials from communities of all sizes have strong positive attitudes toward the value of trees to their communities. These communities vary greatly, however, in their resources, problems, and needs relating to their public trees. In providing assistance to these communities, state and federal agencies along with private organizations should keep in mind the different needs and opportunities presented by different sized communities. Assistance aimed at larger communities can be a cost-effective means for benefiting large and diverse segments of the population. Many of these larger communities already have active tree programs and trained personnel in place with whom agencies can work to address high-priority tree management problems and needs. By contrast, many small communities lack the fiscal or technical resources to support even a minimal tree program and do not have personnel trained in the proper planting, care, and management of trees. Also, many small communities reported not being aware of opportunities to obtain state and federal grants to help support local tree programs. Therefore, fiscal and technical assistance to institute basic tree management practices would be of substantial benefit to many of Illinois' citizens who reside in small communities.

A majority of the respondents to these surveys believed that the state government should provide personnel and technical assistance to help in the development and maintenance of community tree programs. One way to meet the needs raised by this survey would be to have trained community foresters available throughout the state on a multi-county basis to provide assistance to communities in developing or enhancing their tree programs. These community forestry specialists would provide technical assistance to local municipalities to help initiate or further develop community tree programs, including the development or updating of tree ordinances; conduct training workshops for municipal employees and community groups in the proper selection, planting and care of trees; provide information to communities and regional planning agencies that serve those communities to assist in the preparation of community forestry grant applications; and coordinate community tree inventories and hazard tree assessments. A system similar to this already exists in Ohio.

The communities responding to this survey showed considerable interest in applying to state and federal grant programs for help in establishing and developing their tree programs. In particular, small communities, which were the least likely to have applied for a grant in the past, were the most likely to say they desired assistance in applying for such funding. An annually funded grant program at the state level would therefore appear to be an effective means for assisting local decision makers to create sustainable urban forests in their communities.

While these conclusions are based on data from the state of Illinois, we believe that similar findings would hold for

many states, particularly those with a large number of small, rural communities. Illinois is close to the national average in terms of the proportion of its communities with populations less than 25,000 and in the proportion of its citizens that live in these small communities (U. S. Census Bureau 2002). The challenges faced by small Illinois communities in caring for their trees most likely apply to many small communities in other states as well. We hope that the information from the surveys reported here will help to demonstrate the critical need for state and federal programs to assist municipalities with their trees and thereby contribute to the quality of life of community residents.

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Résumé. Cet article traite des résultats combinés de deux enquêtes dans des communautés de l'Illinois à propos de l'état et des besoins de leur programme d'arbres. Ces enquêtes ont été menées en premier lieu pour aider les agences fédérales et de l'état, ainsi que les organisations privées, à mieux effectivement cibler le support qu'ils fournissent aux programmes d'arbres des communautés de l'Illinois. En 1995, on a enquêté auprès des individus responsables des activités d'entretien des arbres dans les petites communautés de l'Illinois (moins de 25000 habitants), alors qu'en 1999 on a élargi l'enquête aux communautés de 25000 habitants ou plus. Les officiers municipaux locaux, peu importe la taille de leur communauté, avaient une attitude fortement positive envers la valeur des arbres dans leur communauté. Néanmoins, les ressources variaient au sein des communautés, de même que les problèmes et les besoins relatifs à leurs arbres publics. Les petites communautés, en particulier, manquent souvent de composantes clés pour un programme efficace de foresterie urbaine ainsi que de personnel entraîné pour mener ces programmes. En fournissant de l'assistance pour les programmes d'arbres des communautés, les organismes fédéraux, d'état et privés devraient garder en tête les besoins distincts et les opportunités des communautés de tailles diverses.

Zusammenfassung. Dieser Artikel berichtet über die kombinierten Ergebnisse von 2 Untersuchungen in Kommunen in Illinois über den Status und die Anforderungen an ihre kommunalen Baumprogramme. Die Untersuchungen waren primär angelegt, um staatlichen und privaten Organisationen eine effektivere Platzierung ihrer Zuwendungen an kommunale Baumprogramme zu steuern. 1995 befragten wir Einzelpersonen, die für Baumpflegeprogramme in kleinen Kommunen in Illinois (weniger als 25.000 EW) zuständig waren und 1999 erweiterten wir die Umfrage auf Kommunen mit mehr als

25.000 EW. Lokale Gemeindevertreter, unabhängig von der Kommunengröße hatten eine deutlich positive Einstellung zum Wert ihrer Bäume für die Kommune. Dennoch variieren die Kommunen in ihren Problemen, Ressourcen und Anforderungen an ihre Bäume. Besonders kleine Kommunen entbehren häufig Schlüsselkomponenten eines effektiven Baumprogramms und haben wenig Personal, um diese Programme durchzuführen. Um Assistenz für diese Baumprogramme zu liefern sollten staatliche und private Organisationen die besonderen Anforderungen und Möglichkeiten von Kommunen unterschiedlicher Größe im Auge behalten.

Resumen. Este artículo reporta los resultados combinados de dos estudios de comunidades de Illinois acerca del estatus y necesidades de sus programas de árboles. Los estudios fueron hechos en principio para ayudar a las agencias estatales, federales y organizaciones privadas a hacer más eficientes el soporte que ellas dan a los programas. En 1995 estudiamos actividades de cuidado de los árboles en pequeñas comunidades de Illinois (población menor de 25,000), y en 1999 extendimos el estudio a comunidades con poblaciones de 25,000 habitantes o mayores. Las oficinas municipales locales, sin importar el tamaño de la población, tienen una actitud positiva hacia el valor de los árboles para sus comunidades. Las comunidades varían, sin embargo, en sus recursos, problemas y necesidades con relación a los árboles públicos. En particular, las pequeñas comunidades con frecuencia carecen de componentes clave de un programa efectivo de árboles y de personal entrenado para llevar a cabo estos programas. Para proporcionar asistencia a las comunidades los programas estatales, federales y de organizaciones privadas deberían tener en mente las distintas necesidades y oportunidades de las comunidades de distintos tamaños.