



ARBORICULTURE PRE-EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM

Young people facing obstacles to traditional employment, with limited knowledge or experience in arboriculture and residing in low-income areas, are looking for new and exciting career opportunities. Many are interested in trees, gardening, and natural resources but have yet to be introduced to these fields during high school. The Arizona Arboriculture Pre-employment Program was piloted in Yuma to introduce young adults to careers in arboriculture while providing training, skill development, and post-program opportunities.

The Arizona Arboriculture Pre-Employment Program (AAPP) in Yuma, modeled after the American Forests curriculum of the same name, was designed to provide opportunities for forestry career exploration targeting the City of Yuma residents aged 18-26. Yuma was selected given the city's low tree equity score and the significant economic importance of protecting healthy trees.

The Arizona Department of Forestry and Fire Management provided seed money through the 2022 Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) allocation to deliver the program in partnership with Arizona Western College's (AWC) Continuing Education Program. The pilot program was an 8-week classroom experience paired with an 8-week internship opportunity. The course was advertised via high schools, community colleges (including AWC), community events, the Yuma Workforce Center, local Native Tribes, social media, and one-on-one conversations with youth in the target age range. The classroom portion of the course utilized instructors from the local arboriculture community as well as subject matter experts. State, municipal, and private organizations hosted interns. Participants were provided tools and resources, including

safety equipment, and were paid to participate for the entire 16 weeks. They received certifications in CPR and first aid and received professional development funding to attend other existing arboriculture workshops sponsored by the Arizona Community Tree Council. Mentors worked with the students to ensure participation. This program is unique because it is only one of a few workforce development programs in Arizona that pays students to participate. It also offers materials for students to keep and provides a framework for success.

Ten participants from underrepresented communities were accepted into the program, eight of whom completed the classroom portion of the course and moved on to internships. Pre- and Post-program evaluations were distributed, and students indicated increased knowledge in categories including tree identification, soils, arborist tools and their use, and professional skills. Two of the students have accepted full-time employment, one accepted part-time employment, and one is currently in the final interview process for full-time employment with their host organizations. All students indicated they enjoyed the program, made professional and peer-to-peer

connections they will keep, gained increased confidence, and are ready to take the next step in their career.

“Two months ago, I would have never imagined myself going up in a bucket truck, climbing a tree, or using a chainsaw, let alone even picking one up and for that I am very proud of myself for stepping outside of my comfort zone.”

Emma Fregozo



Header Left: Students were given the opportunity to shadow industry professionals. **Header Right:** Student inspecting nursery stock. **Above:** Program participants are taught various arboriculture techniques and skills like tree climbing. Photos: Rebecca Clemence