

UCFS Board Member Profile: Emily Okallau

Name: Emily Okallau

City, State/Province, Country: Skokie, IL, USA

Place of Employment: City of Evanston (Evanston, IL, USA)

Job Title: Public Services Coordinator

Educational level and major field: M.Sc.,
International Conservation and Development
(Agroecology)

List any professional certifications: ISA Certified
Arborist, TRAQ Qualified



List any other urban forestry, arboriculture, or related organizations you're involved with:
Member of ISA, Illinois Arborist Association (IAA), Village of Skokie Sustainable Environment
Advisory Commission

LinkedIn profile link: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/emily-okallau-093610103>

Brief bio:

I grew up in the United States with immigrant parents and a strong connection to nature. I spent my summers running wild in the mountains and developed a deep love for the outdoors. I did a lot of fieldwork as a young adult, but these days I work full-time in urban forestry and spend as much time outside with my kids as possible. We love hiking and camping the most, especially because there is always unlimited chocolate in my backpack.

What makes you happy about being an UCFS member?

UCFS is a community for people who get things done. Urban Foresters have to be resourceful, innovative, and adaptable, and those are great types of people to know! This community is growing and changing, and I love seeing that the strategic plan is strongly rooted in service to its members. And, I always enjoy the fun run at the conference!

What got you interested in the field of urban forestry?

I moved to Chicago in 2016, with a background in community conservation and agroecology, and experience in botany. Urban forestry is how I apply my experience and education in this

major metropolitan area. It has allowed me to work with trees as they relate to people, and in the context of a community. We all know that urban trees have significant positive impacts, and I wanted to work towards creating a healthy forest that supported the entire ecosystem – from the soil all the way up to the microclimates in the upper canopy.

In what ways do you want to contribute to the [mission](#) and [strategic direction](#) of UCFS? Are you particularly interested in a certain area of board service such as governance, policy, outreach, financial oversight, etc.? Do you see any of your strengths being especially helpful to leading the organization?

I am interested in contributing to UCFS in the areas of professional development, community-building, and innovation. In my current role I develop large, broad-scale programs to ensure that we are managing our urban forest according to the latest research, trends, and BMPs. This big picture approach is a good use of my experience and talent, and I am skilled at scaling down for what is possible. I believe in starting with what can be achieved, not holding out for creating a complete or perfect solution.

Most importantly, it is critical to hear from the community to build what is helpful, useful, and appropriate for its members. UCFS members should feel encouraged and invited to use their voices. I would embrace the opportunity to contribute to ensuring that all members feel welcome and heard.

Lastly, we all know that climate change and emerging technology are having huge impacts on our field and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. I believe that we need to acknowledge these impacts and work with them, rather than work to “fight” or “combat” these “challenges”. They are here and they are big, and we need to accept their presence and work towards solutions.

Favorite tree and why?

My all-time favorite tree is the African baobab – *Adansonia digitata*. They are gentle giants that give to the ecosystem – food, water, medicine, shelter, habitat, and mystique. Here in the Midwest, I love catalpa trees (*Catalpa speciosa*) for their giant, bright green leaves, nitrogen fixing, great habitat, and because they rarely fail.