

WINSTON CHURCHILL MEMORIAL TRUST

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VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT IN PUBLIC GARDENS IN THE USA

INTRODUCTION

After working in horticulture for more than 30 years I now work in the voluntary sector helping to recruit more volunteers for the many charities and not for profit community organisations in Dorset. Together these organisations provide a wide range of support services to thousands of people. They also provide very many different social, cultural, sporting and environmental benefits to the community that could not possibly be done by the statutory authorities. As such the voluntary sector enhances the quality of life for all citizens. From my work in horticulture I was aware that volunteers play a major part in the operation of public gardens in the USA and so the purpose of my Winston Churchill Memorial Trust fellowship was to look at ways in which my present work could be enhanced and developed by looking at practices in my previous area of activity. Although not presently involved in parks and garden management I have a continuing interest in seeing public gardens develop and improve.

Definition of Public Garden

The choice of gardens to visit was made so as to reflect the wide range of public gardens found in the US. The definition for the purpose of this study is any garden, open to the public for informal recreation and/or public education or information. Thus, the itinerary included gardens owned by city or county authorities, federal facilities, gardens owned or managed by trusts and charitable foundations, and gardens forming part of universities.

A number of the gardens visited had originally been established as the grounds of private residences but had subsequently been donated or bequeathed to local authorities or established as trusts in perpetuity. US law allows for the formation of not-for-profit foundations with the purpose of holding and preserving property for public benefit. As a result the US has many estates with houses and gardens of outstanding merit that are accessible to the public. As well as showcasing horticultural design and plant collections these gardens also offer a range of outreach services such as education programmes for adults and children, venues for events and shows, and advisory services.

University gardens were originally established to provide practical facilities to support teaching and research activity but are now open to public access and use alongside students and academics. In many cases the university offers education programmes for the public as well as registered students.

Whilst the purpose, size and style of garden varied greatly all had one common factor; the use of volunteers. What the volunteers did, how they were recruited and managed, and the benefits accruing to the gardens and to the volunteers was the subject of this study.

Background Notes

This was the author's first visit to the USA since the early 1990's. On previous visits to botanic gardens managers expressed mild surprise that a British horticulturist should want to visit American gardens with a view to learning new management techniques. The UK should be teaching the US how to do things! This uncharacteristic modesty was hardly justified then; it certainly is not justified now. American public gardens have developed considerably in recent years. Imaginative design, extensive new planting and replanting, use of a widening palette of native, introduced and cultivated plants, and increased provision of education and outreach services have contributed to a vibrant horticultural scene which enjoys greater public support than ever and use of public gardens is increasing. Gardening as a hobby is much more widely practised in the US than previously, supporting thriving landscaping, tree-care, nursery and garden centre industries. Gardening books and magazines, television programmes and lifestyle trends foster further public interest. Citizens use public gardens for inspiration, education, information or just informal recreation.

As yet quite modest, but developing rapidly, is the use of public gardens as the focus for raising awareness of wider environmental issues. Issues ranging from energy conservation to protecting native plants are highlighted in displays, plant collections and education programmes. The US is coming late to the environment party and arguably has the most work to do to put its house in order but at least the issues are being raised and discussed.

Several cities are formulating urban planning policies which incorporate energy and waste reduction, tree planting, and wildlife and water conservation procedures. Public gardens clearly have a role to play in highlighting the need for such changes and gaining public support for implementation.

Charges for admission and services. Whilst many gardens offered free access (including all federally-owned facilities and most university-owned sites) some charged admission fees (including some gardens owned by local authorities and many foundation-owned). Entry fees were regarded as a reasonable way to offset

operating costs. They were not a limit on public access as local residents could buy membership or season tickets offering substantial discounts and school groups were admitted at modest cost. Many gardens offered guided tours, courses of instruction and entertainment programmes. These were charged for but given the facilities and the calibre of guides/tutors these were of excellent value and a major benefit to the casual visitor (guided tours) or the keen gardener aiming to enhance their knowledge (courses).

GARDENS VISITED

The U.S. National Arboretum, Washington DC

The arboretum is owned and operated by the US Department of Agriculture, and thus is a federal government facility. It was founded as a research centre but its remit was subsequently extended to include public access. (Research remains an important part of its work). Entry is free to the public.

The arboretum has some 60 paid staff of which 20 run the gardens. There are 140 regular volunteers. They are active in three areas of work; in the science departments such as the herbarium and data collation; in garden maintenance; and in education, including the library and docent service. Volunteers receive a high standard of training including courses and workshops (usually in winter) and a comprehensive training manual. In return volunteers are asked to commit to minimum of 100 hours of service each year. Generally volunteers attend on a set day and work on a same task or area of the garden. As a result they often gain considerable skill in their assigned work.

In addition to the regular volunteers there are around 10 corporate volunteer groups each year and a small number of high school students carrying out community service.

The volunteer manager had recorded that the volunteers contributed a combined total of 11,900 hours in the last year, equivalent to 5.75 full time staff and worth \$224,000.

Volunteers were thanked with an annual luncheon event, regular field trips with staff. The volunteer managers of several Washington area gardens collaborate to exchange ideas on good practice and they arrange a combined annual conference and lunch for volunteers from their gardens.

The United States Botanic Garden, Washington DC

Probably the smallest garden visited but the most prominent, being located beside the Capitol in central Washington and enjoying high visitor numbers. First established in 1933 the gardens have had a major refurbishment in recent years. The conservatory was rebuilt, outdoor gardens replanted and new pathways, lighting etc installed. Though small the range of displays, the density of planting and the extensive interpretation material provide a high quality visitor experience.

Volunteers work in garden maintenance, their contribution being important to the maintenance of high standards. They work as guides and in visitor services. This is particularly valuable work given the high number of visitors and the importance of the public education remit. A number of volunteers have been trained in the Master Gardeners programme and their expertise is much valued. They staff the information point and carry out practical work.

During my visit the garden was staging an exhibition on the global environment aimed at adults and children. Following the recent refurbishment the plant displays of the garden now include themed gardens on native American prairies, endangered plants and medicinal plants. Guided tour leaders and interpretation points in the theme gardens explained the importance of these floras and the possible consequences should they be lost. As the garden is located in one of the most prominent urban sites in the city the exhibition was attracting a large number of visitors.

Hillwood Gardens, Washington DC

Hillwood was originally a private residence but on the death of the owners became a not-for-profit foundation and opened as a public garden in 1977. The estate includes a house, with a valuable collection of art and antiquities, and attractive gardens and grounds. There is a fee for entry but members of the membership scheme are admitted free.

There are some 250 volunteers supporting a total staff of 90. Their roles cover two main areas; firstly garden maintenance and secondly visitor services. Hillwood gives much attention to enhancing visitors' experience. There are guided tours of house and gardens, and various programmes and events for adults, young people and families. After the most recent refurbishment the corps of volunteer guides was increased and new training provided.

Garden volunteers work alongside the professional staff. Training is good with monthly training events and plant knowledge sessions. For docents training includes knowledge of the house and contents and coaching in public speaking skills.

Appreciation is shown through an annual party, field trips to other gardens and the combined conference for Washington area volunteers.

Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC

The Smithsonian was founded in 1843 through a bequest from James Smithson to found an institute for the increase and diffusion of knowledge. It was set up as a public/private trust. In practice it operates as a body of the federal government.

Whilst the Smithsonian is best known for its museums (mainly but not exclusively in Washington DC) it also manages a number of gardens which enhance the surrounding of the museums and galleries and are themselves a major attraction for visitors. (In the case of the Museum of the American Indian the gardens are an integral part of the museum as they feature native plants which were used in traditional culture and crafts). Entry to museums and gardens is free.

The organisation makes extensive use of volunteers in visitor services (guiding, interpreting, education) and in curatorial services (archiving, research support). In the gardens there are less than 20 garden staff but they are supported by more than 40 volunteers. The gardens are high profile and attract many visitors. Several gardens feature substantial seasonal plantings, therefore, workload is high and the volunteers play a key role in helping maintain standards.

Volunteers receive training on the job working with professional gardeners.

Benefits: Volunteers enjoy discounts in the shops and cafes of the Smithsonian museums, and privileged entry to previews and special events. In addition Smithsonian volunteers participate in the Washington area volunteers joint events.

Brooklyn Botanic Garden, New York City

Originally founded in 1897 on land set aside by the city authorities the BBG extends over 52 acres set in the middle of urban Brooklyn. Whilst still supported by the city the gardens are now a not-for-profit foundation. As well as a number of outstanding horticultural collections and displays, some outdoors and some under glass, the gardens support a number of scientific research projects in botany and ecology. There is also a comprehensive programme of education and community outreach. This includes classes and workshops for children and adults, support for community gardening, and waste recycling awareness schemes. The education programmes are linked to the school curriculum for science. There are also guiding and interpretation services for visitors.

Volunteers support many aspects of the garden's work. A number work in gardens maintenance including labour intensive displays such as the rose garden and conservatory. Despite the very high visitor numbers the gardens achieve outstanding standards of display. Volunteers work with and are trained by the professional staff.

Many volunteers work in the education and outreach services. Whilst professional educators run the schools programmes, volunteers are also heavily involved. The BBG's outreach work includes support for community based organisations and gardens.

Guides (known as docents in the US) in the gardens are almost all drawn from the volunteer corps. As is often the case the docents are recruited from amongst the most experienced volunteers, many having given years of service and having a considerable knowledge of the gardens.

The garden also enjoys the support of the BBG Auxiliary, a group of supporters and advocates for the gardens. They are involved in fundraising and running events. Brooklyn also encourages volunteering by high school pupils who come to the garden to fulfil their community service commitment.

The New York Botanical Garden, Bronx, New York

Originally a private estate, later donated to form a research centre and public garden, the site extends to 250 acres. This includes 50 acres of virgin oak forest, an invaluable resource demonstrating the original woodland community of New York region. The science staff conduct practical and laboratory research on a number of topics including ecology and systematic botany.

For the public there are some 48 collections or display gardens including a very comprehensive rose collection and the garden is regarded as a major public asset for the city.

In total there are 550 staff and some 1100 volunteers! In the gardens volunteers support the 60 professional gardeners in general maintenance. Up to 500 volunteers work in the education service which offers programmes for schools and adults, and about 100 volunteers provide the docent team. As is often the case the docents are amongst the longest serving and most experienced volunteers who use their extensive knowledge to enhance visitor experience.

Volunteers also assist in the science and research departments, a role which is important given the increasing amount of environmental education done by the gardens. In addition to regular volunteers there are additional members who help run one-off activities such as community events.

Most volunteers come from the borough of Bronx (where the garden is located) and the adjacent county. Active recruitment was done until recently using advertising but now sufficient new volunteers come through word of mouth. The increasing interest in green issues is raising awareness of the garden and its work.

Benefits & Rewards: Volunteers enjoy free entry to the gardens at any time, free parking and discount on classes/workshops (free for those giving 100 hours+ per year). The volunteer manager has a number of ways to recognise the volunteers' role. There is an annual volunteers' lunch and awards ceremony. The manager sends a handwritten note of thanks to all regular volunteers!

The gardens also encourages volunteering by children aged 13-18. They assist in children's education programmes and at arts and crafts events. In return they receive a modest stipend as a token of appreciation.

The State Arboretum of Virginia, Boyce, Virginia

Blandy's Farm was given to the State of Virginia in 1926 for the establishment of a centre for agricultural research and education. It covers more than 700 acres. The research function continues under the auspices of the University of Virginia but the centre is also open for public access. There are extensive meadows and woodland with collections of native and introduced plants. The grounds include various plant collections and displays.

The site is used for informal recreation by local residents and for more formal garden displays and education. Education outreach is aimed at children, schools and adults. The schools programme supports the school curriculum in science teaching. There are also classes in a variety of horticultural or science topics. The centre has paid staff in charge of the education programmes but they are supported by volunteers, who organise and in some cases deliver courses.

The Foundation is a voluntary group, open to all, which supports the arboretum with fundraising, public events and practical help in maintenance and development. Most volunteers come from Winchester and the surrounding county.

A notable feature of Blandy Farm is the way the centre makes available land or facilities for other voluntary organisations such as American Farmland Trust, Audubon Society, Virginia Native Plant Society, American Boxwood Association, Garden Clubs and Youth Groups. These groups use the site and are featured in the centre's website and print media. In short Blandy Farm affords multiple opportunities for public outreach and engagement.

Virginia House, Richmond, Virginia

Virginia House was built in 1929 using stone from a demolished Augustinian priory in Warwick, England. Alexander and Virginia Weddell created a modern residence within a Tudor style shell. On the steeply sloping grounds they developed a garden combining traditional English and Italian elements with 20C American ideas. The designer was Charles Gillette, an influential landscape architect of the day. The Weddells intended the house to serve as headquarters of the Virginia Historical Society and willed the property to the society. It continues in this role. In addition the house and gardens are now open to the public for which there is an admission charge.

There are about 30 regular volunteers mainly working in garden care. As the society retains only a small paid staff the contribution of the volunteers is vital to achieve such high standards. Volunteers include adults and high school students (minimum age 15) who work here as part of their community service commitment.

The director of horticulture trains volunteers for service at Virginia House and as part of the Master Gardeners and Master Naturalists Programs of the county extension service. This enhances the skills level of volunteers and is a motivator. The director emphasised that volunteering should be a pleasant experience and rewards the regular volunteers with field trips to other gardens and an annual garden party. They also have privileged access to historical society events.

River Farm, Alexandria, Virginia

River Farm is the headquarters of the American Horticultural Society the largest members' organisation for amateur gardeners in the US. The 25 acre site was once owned by George Washington. It was acquired by the society in the 1970's and continues to develop as the location for display gardens and outreach and education programmes.

The Friends of River Farm is a members group which provides much of the volunteer input. Volunteer recruitment has targeted both the traditional (older) age group and younger volunteers not usually attracted to public gardens. The regular volunteers are available for garden maintenance, usually on weekdays whilst younger, urban professionals join in with running events and weekend programmes. The society tries to reach schools, churches and groups of young single people who might like the work in the gardens and enjoy the social side of volunteering.

The AHS is taking a lead in raising public awareness of environmental issues. Their 'Green Garage' project combines awareness raising with information on good practice in gardening and household design. The project has been featured at the National Botanic Garden in Washington. The 'Growing Connection' project is similar scheme aimed at children.

The Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden, Richmond, Virginia

Lewis Ginter was founded in 1984 as a not-for-profit corporation with the gift of land to the City of Richmond that had seen horticultural plantings since the 19C. Once established as a public garden Lewis Ginter has seen almost continuous development of its collections, buildings and education work. So successful has this been that the gardens are now regarded as amongst the best public gardens on the east coast, even though only 40 acres in size. The gardens are now supported by endowments, by capital grants and by membership.

The gardens have 400+ volunteers, some regular, some for one-off events, supporting 50 paid staff. Volunteers work in many sections of the gardens. As there are only 9 professional gardeners their role in garden maintenance is important. Education has been central to Lewis Ginter's mission from the start and volunteers are active in support of the extensive programme for children, schools and adults.

The volunteer manager encourages and supports volunteers from as many community groups as possible. School and college students (minimum age 13) can learn skills for credits and fulfil community service commitment. Corporate volunteers are encouraged, especially to help with major events. Even people sentenced by a court to community service orders are welcomed and integrated.

The garden has a comprehensive volunteer handbook which serves as training and induction manual and as the basis for continuing updating.

Virginia is active in training Master Gardeners and many serve in the Lewis Ginter either in garden maintenance or as advisors for visitors.

The garden is taking active steps to operate in an environmentally sensitive manner; reducing use of pesticides and artificial fertilisers, trapping all water run-off into a constructed wetland and recycling waste. The garden received a grant for its water management plan.

The Maymont Foundation, Richmond, Virginia

Maymont House and Garden were originally a private residence built by James Dooley who was a local industrialist and his wife Sallie. When they died in the 1920s the estate was left to the City of Richmond as a public park. Though the city opened the site to the public over the years they were unable to devote enough resources to develop the estate and activities and so a not-for-profit foundation was established. It now includes the original Maymont House, the 100 acres of gardens and arboretum, a nature centre and a children's farm.

Maymont has a total of 400 volunteers including regular volunteers and those working occasionally on special events. Their roles cover house and garden guides, education (such as in the children's farm) and garden maintenance. This last role is especially important as Maymont has only 3 full-time horticultural staff but extensive gardens.

Most regular volunteers are in the older age bracket as they have free time on weekdays. Younger volunteers are encouraged through the Dooley Society which supports Maymont through fundraising, events and practical help. The society particularly attracts urban professionals and single people who often have skills of benefit to a charitable organisation and seek an outlet for their talents as well as opportunity to meet others.

Volunteers are trained in-house working alongside the professional staff and experienced volunteers.

Reward: The volunteers enjoy an annual garden party and dinner to mark their contribution and honour long-serving members. They also have field trips to other notable gardens.

One fun activity for all volunteers and supporters is The Great Day of Raking when as many volunteers as possible attend to rake up the autumn leaves and clear debris. This could be a mammoth task but instead is turned into an enjoyable event.

Maymont also used 'volunteers' sentenced by the courts to carry out community service. These volunteers tend to do more menial tasks whilst student volunteers get the 'fun' tasks.

Green Spring Gardens, Alexandria, Virginia

Green Spring was originally a private estate but was given to Fairfax County in 1970 as a public park. The already extensive gardens, designed by Beatrix Farrand, have been enhanced with 20 theme gardens, a library, demonstration areas and a horticultural centre. The gardens are open year round without charge.

As well as being a park for informal recreation Green Springs has a mission to raise awareness and understanding of horticulture and the environment, including current concern about climate change. The assistant director commented on the growing importance of public gardens in this activity. The gardens have a variety of programmes for adults and children, especially ones linked to the school curriculum.

The small paid staff is helped by 150+ volunteers who are active in all aspects of the garden's work including garden maintenance, guiding, library and running demonstrations and courses. Green Springs works in collaboration with the

Cooperative Extension Service to host a Master Gardeners training programme. Trainees receive 50 hours of training and then donate a minimum of 50 hours voluntary service either in an advisory capacity or in hands-on work. The Master Gardeners are a major asset to the gardens in both maintaining the quality of the gardens and in delivering the outreach mission.

Brookside Gardens, Wheaton, Maryland

Owned by Montgomery County and set within a large regional park this public garden aims to foster the art of gardening and the science of horticulture. The 50 acre site includes a number of display gardens and conservatories, which continue to develop under skilled management. Brookside runs an extensive programme of courses, workshops and events for education and recreation.

The gardens have permanent paid staff of only 30, rising to 70 in summer so volunteers make a significant contribution to the range and level of services. It is estimated that volunteers cover at least 40 roles including gardens maintenance, interpretation, supervising the butterfly house, and running the shop and library. They are also active in delivering education. There are some 450 regular volunteers and as many again available for single events during the year. Training is mainly done by in-house staff according to the intended duties of the volunteer.

Montgomery County has a Volunteer Services Office which coordinates volunteer recruitment across the county's park network, including Brookside. It is estimated that volunteers contribute 60,000 hours of work per year.

Chicago Botanic Garden, Glencoe, Illinois

Chicago has had a volunteer programme since 1972. They currently have more than 1,100 regular volunteers who support a paid staff of approx. 500.

A notable feature of the volunteer programme was the way volunteers were integrated with the professional staff. Volunteers are usually organised into teams which work in a particular department or area. The supervising staff are expected to plan and manage their team of volunteers and younger managers are given special training in team leadership to ensure this is achieved. Before starting work volunteers attend an orientation meeting with their proposed team to ensure they will fit in and enjoy their role.

Training is thorough; in the gardens supervisors provide instruction in general horticulture and special skills for each task. There is a programme of continuing training. For many volunteers the opportunity to learn new skills is a key motivator. The gardens have a substantial programme of research with which volunteers are also actively involved.

Recognising that volunteering should be as inclusive as possible the garden has volunteer work available at weekends so that the 30 – 50 year olds with weekday commitments can still get involved. They also encourage corporate and group volunteering, and volunteering by high school students (minimum age 15) during school holidays. The net result of this approach is that the garden is seen as a community asset to which all have access and opportunity for engagement.

As well as the regular volunteers there is an additional corps who are involved in one-off events such as the popular Winter Festival. Many of these volunteers are drawn from the friends of the garden organisation.

Rewards and recognition: There is an annual luncheon and awards ceremony for all volunteers. Individual departments or teams also hold their own events such as field trips or meals together. Long service awards are made for those serving 10 years or more. Volunteers enjoy discount rates on courses and workshops.

Garfield Park Conservatory, Chicago, Illinois

Garfield Park is part of the Chicago City Parks District. Located in extensive parkland the conservatory is a 100 year old showpiece structure with a collection of tropical and sub-tropical plants and surrounding display gardens. The conservatory houses frequent displays and events. Central to the volunteer function is the Garfield Park Conservatory Alliance, a community based charity which supports the work of the conservatory and other botanical centres and is engaged in public outreach in areas of environment and social development in West Chicago. There are over 500 registered volunteers of which about 250 are active, the remainder being available for events.

As a city facility volunteer recruitment must comply with set procedures. All volunteers complete a written application, background checks are made and before starting they are asked to attend an orientation day.

Alliance volunteers work with staff in plant collection maintenance, they run the demonstration gardens and are much involved in education programmes. Education includes leisure time courses and programmes for schools linked to the curriculum. I particularly enjoyed looking at the vegetable and herb gardens, the composting demonstration and the sculpture collection.

The Conservatory makes great efforts to be inclusive in its volunteer recruiting by having weekend volunteering, by encouraging volunteering from high school students and by devolving event management to volunteers. The gardens also encouraged community engagement by offering a venue at little or no cost to community organisations running events. At the time of my visit Americorp (a volunteer project for young people) was holding an event.

Descanso Gardens, La Canada Flintridge, California

Descanso is a public garden in which volunteers play a significant role in both the management and in day-to-day operations.

The garden was originally the private residence of E Manchester Boddy, a newspaper publisher and businessman with a keen interest in horticulture. Sited on an area of native live oak the gardens feature a number of plant collections, notably of camellias and roses. On the death of Mr Boddy the site was sold to the LA County in 1953 for a public garden. Due to the rate of development in the area and the possible risk of the site being sold or reduced a group of concerned citizens formed a support organisation. The Descanso Gardens Guild is a not-for-profit body which manages the resources of the garden to inspire an interest in horticulture and supports its programmes of activities. The Guild is made up of volunteers many of whom are also actively involved in the running of the gardens.

Descanso uses its resources wisely to improve income streams. Income comes from admission fees, members' dues, rental of house and grounds for filming, concert venue, weddings, plant sales, and donations and grants.

There are just 16 full-time staff but some 400 volunteers. Their work includes garden maintenance, running education programmes, garden and house guides, and running events. Descanso has a thriving members organisation. Members enjoy free entry and other benefits. Many members go on to become volunteers and become more actively involved.

University of California at Riverside, Botanic Garden

Established as a teaching and research facility for students of the university the site also now serves as a public garden. The gardens comprise a semi-natural area of native California plants, planted areas of Mediterranean species and a fine succulent collection. The gardens have an 18-man Board (all volunteers) involved in fundraising, running the friends organisation and recruiting volunteers. The friends group is very successful with some 12,000 members.

Regular volunteers work in the gardens (12) and provide the docent service (12) whilst there are at least 100 volunteers who can be called on to run events and fundraising days.

The county run a successful Master Gardener Program. The trained gardeners are welcomed by the botanic garden and now make up over half the active volunteers.

Volunteers are recruited through the garden's website, the friends' newsletter, through the Master Gardner network and by word-of-mouth.

The gardens have a minimum age limit of 18 due to university employment rules. The curator commented that this restriction was a limitation as they receive frequent requests from high schools, scouts groups etc for volunteering opportunities for young people.

Rancho Santa Ana Botanic Garden, Claremont, California

Rancho Santa Ana is an 86 acre garden dedicated exclusively to the collection, conservation and display of native flora of California. The garden is home to the botany department of the Claremont Graduate University and conducts research in many areas. In addition the site is open for free public access for casual visits or to attend courses and workshops. There is also an education programme for schools.

There are some 80 paid staff covering research, curatorial work and grounds maintenance. They are assisted by 215+ regular volunteers who contribute an estimated 22,000 hours per year. Volunteers are involved in all aspects of the garden's work including administration, curatorial and data recording work, garden maintenance, leading tours, staffing events at the site and representing the gardens at off-site events.

Volunteers have their own Volunteer Organisation with a board of directors. They wrote their own bylaws (code of practice) and hold regular meetings and 'enrichment' events for volunteers. As well as helping to manage the volunteer corps in support of the staff the organisation is a significant fundraiser for the garden. There is an annual volunteer appreciation dinner.

Training is thorough. Volunteers prepared to commit to a minimum of 40 hours per year receive 7 training sessions (each 4 hours long) which include presentations from each department and practical activities in the gardens. The most comprehensive preparation is given to 'Nature Interpreters', who are trained in plant knowledge and in guiding techniques before leading tours.

Active recruitment of volunteers has stopped because there are plenty of recruits coming forward due to word of mouth advertising amongst current volunteers! At present the challenge for the volunteer manager is to match the many volunteers to their areas of interest.

Los Angeles County Arboretum, Arcadia, California

Owned by the LA County this garden covers 127 acres and has extensive areas of woodland as well as plant collection outdoors and under glass. It is open to the public for a small admission charge, though local residents may have season tickets. The gardens also increase income by acting as venue for concerts and events.

Volunteers young and old are welcome. High school and college students volunteer as part of their community service activity. Adults may volunteer for occasional service at events or for regular work. Those joining 'Los Voluntarios' and committing to at least 50 hours per year receive comprehensive training and enjoy a number of benefits such as recognition events and training days.

Volunteers are offered a very wide selection of tasks; in administration, curatorial work, library, garden maintenance, information and guiding and in the extensive education programme available for adults and schools. The volunteers are well integrated with the employed staff and the large number of hours contributed makes a significant difference to what is achieved. As a botanical garden there is much work to be done on plant recording and mapping; a task devolved to a team of regular volunteers. This is particularly important at present when areas of the garden are being redeveloped and replanted.

As well as regular volunteers the arboretum encourages individuals and groups to get involved with one-off events and short projects. This helps maintain a network of supporters for events and encourages volunteering by people not able to attend regularly. For example, at the time of my visit the arboretum was about to host a large public concert and a gala dinner for a national conference, and many volunteers were on site.

The Huntington Gardens and Library, San Marino, California

The Huntington Estate is one of the finest public gardens in the US. Originally the private residence of Henry and Arabella Huntington it includes a large house in the Beaux-Arts style, now housing an extensive collection of art works, a library of rare books and mature gardens. The gardens cover 120 acres and include a Japanese garden, a Chinese garden, children's gardens and numerous outstanding collections, especially the desert garden, palm garden and the Cycad collection. There are 300 paid staff.

The volunteer manager reported that there are just over 1,000 volunteers, ranging in age from 14 to 92 and active in almost all areas of work around the estate.

Training is thorough with new garden recruits going through the 'Volunteer Academy' a programme covering basic botany and specialist studies in areas of the garden before assignment to a particular team. Given the quality of the collections and garden features the volunteers have the opportunity to work in outstanding locations.

As ever the volunteers with the highest training are the docents. Often recruited from existing volunteers the new docents are asked to commit to at least two years service before receiving a comprehensive training in the garden or museum. Most docents serve much longer than the minimum and often have very considerable knowledge of their specialist area.

The Huntington also encourages young volunteers, taking up to 60 high school students each year. The students commit to a minimum of 40 hours service and are mainly engaged in the areas of adult and children's education, or in the conservatory for botanical science. Given that community service is a requirement for graduation in many high schools the students see a successful placement as an academic step as well as a prestigious social activity.

The Huntington has a Volunteer Council made up of representatives of volunteers from each section of the estate. It meets monthly to discuss matters of interest and for training purposes.

Benefits and Rewards: There is an annual dinner for volunteers at which long service awards are made. Volunteers receive other benefits such as discounted access to events and courses.

It is clear that the Huntington has a very well organised and effective volunteer corps which plays a key role in the success of the estate as a public garden. Whilst the estate is very valuable the operating costs are high and the budget is not unlimited. The volunteer team is key to achieving the high standard of displays and collections, and the visitor services which make Huntington such an outstanding attraction.

LESSONS LEARNT

As the project progressed it became clear that there was no single magic formula for recruiting and managing volunteers. Rather the impression gained was that good volunteer management meant paying attention to a number of key points which together would help ensure successful engagement of volunteers and a happy experience for all parties. All gardens had a manager responsible for volunteers. In most cases this was a full-time dedicated post. Given that in many cases the number of volunteers far exceeded the number of paid staff then skilful management of the volunteers was key to enabling the organisation to achieve its mission.

At each organisation visited I interviewed the volunteer coordinator or the manager with that responsibility. I also met many individual volunteers who related their own experience of volunteering. A number recurring points or lessons emerged from the interviews.

Integration of Volunteers

All garden managers emphasised the value of volunteers to the overall success of the organisation's mission. Before engaging volunteers management had consulted with paid staff and professionals to discuss how volunteers might be integrated into the organisation and how they would enhance the work of the professionals. Staff were encouraged to identify tasks and responsibilities that could be allocated to volunteers. It was made clear that volunteers would not replace paid posts. They would not be a threat to the livelihood or professionalism of scientists, horticulturists and curators but would extend their opportunities for outreach programmes, research and establishing new plant collections.

If paid staff were members of trade unions then union representatives were also consulted to agree that paid posts would not be replaced with volunteers.

At least one organisation mentioned that staff who had regular responsibility for volunteers were offered training in team management skills to ensure their volunteers were used to best effect. (in Chicago Botanic Garden this applied to all garden maintenance supervisors). In some instances tasks were devolved wholly to volunteers and the professional staff collaborated to ensure the volunteers received comprehensive training and support to enable them to do the work. A good example of this was garden guides who were often all volunteers.

Recruitment

Methods of recruitment varied but the most often cited as successful were advertising at the venue, advertising in friends of the garden newsletters and word of mouth. Word of mouth is in many respects the most useful. It is direct, free and done by existing, happy volunteers who are most likely to select other suitable volunteers. The disadvantage is that it may limit the pool of potential volunteers. A number of gardens felt that they did not attract as wide a range of people to volunteering as might be desirable. People in the 30 – 50 age group were often under-represented. These people were the most likely to have full-time jobs or domestic commitments which limited their time for volunteering especially as few gardens had volunteer activities at week-end. However, many gardens had a pool of volunteers who might be active for one-off events such as concerts, plant sales, lectures and fundraising activities. Their involvement might therefore be infrequent but was vital to the success of events.

Few volunteer managers had specifically recruited the unemployed. The cost of travelling to the venue may be a limiting factor. All programmes were open to disabled volunteers and roles would be found appropriate to their abilities.

All gardens asked potential volunteers to complete an application form either by post or electronically, giving basic personal information, past involvement in volunteering and preferred role at the garden. The volunteer manager followed up with either a telephone or face to face interview. This was intended to be informal and mainly intended to ensure the recruit understood what was involved in volunteering and to discuss their likely role.

Many gardens then asked the recruit to sign a volunteer agreement. This was considered to be useful for ensuring the volunteer was clear about their role, responsibilities and rights within the organisation and ensuring the person was covered by insurance. The degree of formality of these documents varied, with federally owned gardens having the most complexity.

Role allocation

An organisation would not take on a paid employee without a clear definition of their intended duties and responsibilities yet volunteers are so often treated in this way. The managers interviewed often stressed the importance of an early meeting with the potential volunteer to decide what tasks they wished to do and whether there was a suitable vacancy. Matching volunteer to task was a key skill for the volunteer manager. Volunteers then had a fairly good idea what work they would be doing, who they would report to and the extent of their commitment before starting. A volunteer could change duties at some point but in reality if a volunteer enjoys their role they often stay with it indefinitely.

Many volunteers worked in front of house roles and were the public face of the organisation. Professional scientists and horticulturists may have been responsible for the core activities of the gardens but without guides, educators, shop staff and friends groups the general public would be less well informed about those activities and the outreach mission of the gardens would be less effective. There would in turn be less public support for the gardens and far less sponsorships and donations. The education programmes are usually lead by professional educators but much of the organising and delivery is done by volunteers.

Induction & Training

As with paid staff, volunteers should have a comprehensive induction to the organisation so that they understand the work of the organisation and how their department or team fits into the overall picture. As well as practical benefits a good induction gave new volunteers a sense of belonging and emphasised the value of their individual contribution. In most gardens induction was followed by training sessions. Training might consist of simply working alongside experienced staff or involve more formal sessions. In some gardens recruits received a training manual which they studied at their leisure. It was emphasised that recruits do not regard training as a chore; rather it is a motivator as learning new skills is one reason for becoming a volunteer.

Volunteer Handbooks

Several gardens had volunteer handbooks which gave written details of the roles and responsibilities of volunteers as well as background information on the gardens or houses. Whilst volunteers do not receive the benefits of paid staff nevertheless they have certain legal entitlements and these could be covered in the handbook. The handbooks were often used as part of the volunteers' training and were updated regularly.

Sense of Belonging

The means to foster a sense of belonging to the organisation and being valued were many and varied, but all served to remind the volunteers and the staff, and visitors they encountered that their role was important. A designated mess room, designated parking spaces, a uniform (hats, shirts, name badges), sets of tools, were all noted. In many instances volunteers worked regularly with a particular staff member or department and were specifically identified as part of that team.

I was pleased to meet a number of volunteers who, because of their long service knew more about the work of the garden than many junior staff members.

Rewards

By definition volunteers are unpaid and in theory a sense of an important job well done should be its own reward. However, there are many other ways to acknowledge the work of volunteers.

For garden maintenance volunteers the opportunity to work with outstanding plant collections, some of national importance, is a significant incentive. In most cases volunteers were supervised and trained by well qualified professional horticulturists. For the keen gardener the opportunity to learn from the professional is a major motivator. In most cases the quality of the gardens was a direct reflection of the input by volunteer teams and was commented on by staff and visitors. Similarly, the volunteers who worked with research staff knew that their data gathering contributed to respected research papers and reports.

A form of reward is promotion. In many gardens the most skilled volunteer task was as docent (guide). This usually required training from staff and considerable study by the volunteer. Most gardens asked for a minimum commitment of volunteer time from their docents but in return they were regarded as amongst the most valuable volunteers. They had the most contact with visitors and influenced of the organisation.

All gardens held events for volunteers at least once each year. These were usually barbecues, picnics or formal dinners to which all volunteers were invited. Senior staff attended and long service awards were made.

In the Washington DC area the volunteer managers from several public gardens arrange a joint conference event for their volunteers. Usually held at a notable garden in the area the event includes guest speakers, guided tours or workshops and a meal. The event involves considerable preparation and expense but the managers regard it as a very worthwhile way to thank their volunteers.

Sometimes the simplest ways of thanking people are the best. At two gardens the volunteer managers send a handwritten card to each regular volunteer thanking them for their contribution during the year. Both remarked that whilst this was a time consuming task it was an excellent way to acknowledge every individual's contribution and was much appreciated by their volunteers.

Many gardens did reward their volunteers in ways which might be said to have monetary value. Volunteers enjoyed free entry to the gardens even when off duty, they received discounts in the shop or restaurant, and preferential rates for attendance at courses, workshops, concerts and other events. As many volunteers were also supporters of the garden and keen to participate in activities these would be useful benefits.

Payment of expenses

Unlike in the UK where volunteers often receive out of pocket expenses, mainly to cover travel costs, no such payments were paid in US gardens. Managers suggested that until recently fuel costs were so modest that few volunteers considered them a burden. Also, a US taxpayer may claim against tax for expenses incurred in voluntary work as well as in paid employment. This may be satisfactory for many people but would not encourage volunteering by people of limited means who could not afford to operate a car, such as young people and the unemployed. The recent rise in fuel costs is leading to a rethink on the issue.

The Master Gardeners Program

In many ways the Master Gardeners Program represents the elite of the horticultural volunteer world. The program was originally founded as an adjunct to the US Department of Agriculture Extension Service. The extension service was set up to offer information and advice to farmers and professional growers on a range of technical matters. Over time the number of professionals declined but the number of amateur or home gardeners and small-scale growers increased greatly. The demands on the extension advisory service became too great for the staff available and volunteers were recruited to handle enquiries from amateur and home gardeners. Master Gardens receive comprehensive training from professional horticulturists and scientists at very modest cost (largely to cover books and materials). In return the volunteers commit to carrying out a minimum of 40 hours service in the first year and continuing commitment to update their knowledge and offer volunteer hours in subsequent years. Master Gardeners answer enquiries by phone and staff information points at farmers markets, county shows and other events.

As well as working in the extension advisory service Master Gardeners may give their volunteer hours in approved public gardens. Their work may again be in advisory roles or in practical gardening work. Several of the gardens visited had Master Gardeners amongst their volunteers. Because of their comprehensive training and experience they were regarded as a considerable asset. The gardens did not run Master Gardener training programmes, (this is the responsibility of county extension offices) but many garden staff contributed lectures or workshops to the training programmes.

Following the success of the Master Gardener programmes the scheme has been extended in recent years with the development of Master Composters and Master Naturalists.

The issues of green waste, recycling and organic gardening have received so much attention that they have become a subject of study in themselves. Most gardens had displays on composting and ways to minimise waste in the garden. The Master Composters were trained to offer information and run demonstrations at the gardens.

With the increasing interest in gardening in the US has come awareness of wider environmental issues such as conservation of wildlife and habitats. The Master Naturalists are trained to provide information, advice and practical help with conservation projects whether in the gardens or in the community.

(There have been some attempts to create something similar to the Master Gardeners scheme in the UK but the key element of free training in return for voluntary service has not been emulated).

Summary

When first reflecting on the outcomes of this study I was prepared to make quite modest claims; a story of many small points leading to incremental improvements. No one idea stands out as the magic formula for successfully recruiting and managing volunteers. Rather the message from my contacts is that one must pay attention to many small details which together will achieve success. I felt that the first success at the gardens visited was probably the appointment of a volunteer manager, recognition that volunteer programmes require a dedicated officer with the time and ability to maintain contact with hundreds of volunteers (and potential volunteers) and liaise with professional staff to ensure volunteers are used to best effect. It is a major fallacy to assume that because volunteers are not paid then their work is free. On the contrary, organisations hoping to use volunteers successfully must budget for management and material costs before any scheme can begin. Perhaps because volunteering is so common in the US the public gardens visited had allocated resources to ensure their volunteer programmes were effective and efficient. This is a message worth repeating in the UK where resources to sustain volunteer programmes are too often given grudgingly.

Similarly it was recognised that volunteer management should be devolved through the organisation. One would not have a team of paid employees without proper supervision. So staff with responsibility for volunteers were trained to plan and manage their volunteers' work.

Having said that, it was noticeable that some tasks and responsibilities were almost wholly devolved to volunteers, with experienced volunteers managing newer recruits. Staff needed only to liaise with the volunteers to ensure resources were adequate and tasks were completed.

However, in reviewing my interview notes I am struck by one recurring theme: the longevity of service of many of the volunteers. Ten years of service was common, 15 to 20 years not uncommon and 20+ years more than a few times. The record was set by Mr Bill Long who has been a volunteer at the Maymont Foundation in Richmond, Virginia for 28 years. Perhaps, therefore I may claim a more significant finding; this study has discovered a formula for eternal youth, just become a volunteer in a public garden!

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