

A Manual



**communities
in nature**

GROWING THE SOCIAL ROLE
OF BOTANIC GARDENS

for Gardens



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**Communities in Nature:
Growing the Social Role of Botanic Gardens**
A Manual for Gardens

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Contents

03	Foreword
04	What do we mean by GSR?
07	1. Getting started
13	2. Working in partnership
18	3. Community engagement
27	4. Incorporating environmental issues
32	5. Project management tips
39	6. What skills are required?
41	7. Turning pilot project into sustainable GSR
45	8. Embedding the social role
49	9. Raising your garden's GSR profile
51	Evaluation resources



Stroud Macular Disease Society visitor making a hurdle at Westonbirt Arboretum.

Introduction

This manual is intended for botanic gardens and other site-based institutions, such as museums and arboreta, who want to engage with their local communities more effectively. In developing their 'social role' these organisations understand that they cannot simply hope and wait for people to come to them, but instead have to take the initiative, step outside and get active in their local communities.

Some pioneering gardens are already moving in this direction. In the UK, for example, BGCI's Communities in Nature programme has seen four botanic gardens pilot small-scale community projects. Elsewhere, in Australia and the United States as well as the UK, other gardens have embarked on similar projects.

The GSR Manual is a distillation of the lessons learned by these gardens and their counterparts around the world.

It is a practical, step-by-step guide that tells you how to get started, how to negotiate access to your communities and create partnerships and, crucially, how to embed a social role in your own organisation's culture and practices in order to achieve long-term sustainability.

How to Grow your Social Role

What do we mean by GSR?

In Growing its Social Role (GSR), a botanic garden must work in partnership with its local community on common issues of social and environmental importance that are for the enduring benefit of that community, the garden itself, and a sustainable future for our planet.

GSR is a pro-active process, requiring the garden to reach out to marginalised, disenfranchised or under-represented elements in its host community. For some gardens, traditionally more comfortable with waiting for visitors to come to them, this may be a counter-cultural step. But a willingness to engage actively with the community is

an essential pre-requisite of GSR.

And it's similar to the socially inclusive initiatives that many museums have been developing over the last two decades, often responding to government legislation and initiatives.

“As agents of individual, community and societal change, museums have demonstrated their potential to contribute towards the combating of issues such as poor health, high crime, low educational attainment and unemployment. In this way, the role of the museum in tackling exclusion and promoting inclusion is understood in terms of its social impact in relation to disadvantage, discrimination and social inequality’ (Sandell, 2003, pp.45-46).

“Working in partnership with its local community on common issues of social and environmental importance.”

And why is this important ?

Scientists are increasingly concerned about the impact of human activity on the global environment. Many agree that humans are directly responsible for the

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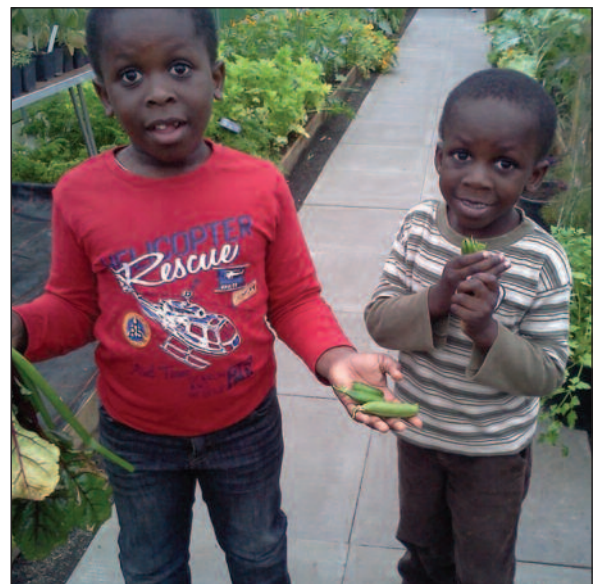


current mass extinction of species, the sixth in Earth's history but the first that may be laid at the door of a single species. They argue that anthropogenic climate change poses one of the greatest current threats to global biodiversity (Maclean & Wilson, 2011). Human-induced habitat loss is said to be placing at risk one fifth of the world's plant species. (KEW, 2010).

The Convention of Biological Diversity commits botanic gardens to promote education and awareness about plant diversity and the need for its conservation. As showcases of living

plant collections and havens of calm and contemplation, they are uniquely qualified to explain how important plants and people are to each other. Moreover, as humankind's dislocation from the natural world becomes ever more pronounced, the role of botanic gardens as a bridge back to nature grows in urgency and importance.

Unfortunately however, although the running of education and community projects is widespread among botanic gardens, these are rarely framed within



Edible gardening! Young visitors from Pilton Community Health Project.

How to Grow your Social Role

the context of their wider social role.

There are significant gaps in the visitor profiles of botanic gardens, while the gardens themselves are often regarded by these disenfranchised groups as exclusive, elite institutions (Dodd & Jones, 2010).

Target 14 of the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation (GSPC) prioritises understanding the importance of plant diversity and the need for plant conservation. In growing their social role, botanic gardens are both actively engaging with a broader spectrum of their host communities and explicitly linking social and environmental responsibility with the fundamental objective of ensuring a sustainable and biodiverse future for our planet.

In key research areas – human health-care, nutrition and plant management for the support of livelihoods – the work of botanic gardens is already globally



significant (Dodd & Jones, 2010).

In its landmark reports *Towards a New Social Purpose*, 2010 and *Growing the Social Role*, 2011, produced with the continuing and unstinting support of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, BGCI argues that gardens have to relocate their social and environmental roles within a modern framework of values, mission and vision and urges them to work together, through partnerships and networking organisations like BGCI, to face the environmental and social challenges of the coming decades.

1. Getting started

There's no quick-fix to growing the social role of your botanic garden and effecting what may be a profound cultural shift in your organisation can be a daunting prospect. It's important to be realistic about what you can achieve, especially if you are starting with a blank canvass. There's much to be said, therefore, in starting small – a small-scale community project for example – and working up to something more ambitious. and wide-ranging.

- **So how do you get started?**
- **What issues do you need to consider?**
- **What data would be useful and how would you use it to guide your next steps?**

A useful first step is to make sure you understand the current mission, culture and visitor profile of your organisation. In conducting audience research or

what is known as visitor segmentation you can identify the socio-economic profile of your current visitors and their needs. Do they represent a broad spectrum of society or are they drawn from specific points along that spectrum – middle class, educated and middle-aged for example?

Other useful questions could include:

- Who are our existing visitors? (visitor profiles of age, male/female, disabilities, income, ethnicity)
- What data do we have already?
- Can we use data from other similar sites?
- Is there regional, national or international data and research?
- Why do the visitors visit us? And what do they think about the garden?
- What do they want and need?
- How do they use the garden at the moment?
- What about people who don't visit at the moment? How can we find out?

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Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh

At the Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh's Edible Gardening project, the garden staff collected information about their local area from official sources and also from personal contacts:

- 'We spoke to local schools, community groups and organisations that already engage with the local community.

- We found out more about our local community through the index of multiple deprivation

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/SIMD>

- We used staff's personal contacts and experience; The Edible Gardening Project team is well networked in Edinburgh. The staff have worked with various local community groups in other roles with different organisations.

- We used previous experience of colleagues at the RBGE who have worked on community engagement projects at the garden'.

- Who isn't visiting and why? Do they even know the garden exists?
- What do they want and need? What are the barriers to them visiting?
- Where else do they go at the moment? (Measures, 2012)

Once you've established your current visitor profile, you're a step closer to filling in the gaps and working out who isn't coming through your gates. This is also an invaluable way of finding out more about your local community and your garden's place in it.

Gather as much information as you can about your community. There's a great deal available online, of course, and you should exploit any established links that you or the garden may have with local authorities and other community groups. Make sure you are familiar with local issues and concerns because these may provide the seeds for future community projects.

Growing the social role of a botanic garden is not just about audience development. It is also about meeting community needs and addressing social and environmental issues of mutual importance.

How to Grow your Social Role

The next stage is to identify a potential partner in the community and also to select a potential social and/or environmental issue on which to collaborate. It's important to keep in mind, throughout this process, your own garden's potential and capacity to deliver on the project.

Start small

The experience of gardens already engaged in socially relevant work

“Start small and build slowly: Start with one project and establish its success. Each time a component is added, evaluate its success and ensure that there is organisation capacity to maintain the addition. Building too quickly can negatively impact program quality and stability.”

Jennifer Schwarz Ballard, Ph.D.,
Chicago Botanic Garden



Cabot Primary School Gardening Club planting *Calendula sp.*

(e.g. KEW, Chicago Botanic Gardens) suggests that successful small-scale projects with local community groups, are an effective springboard to more ambitious programmes.

Selecting community groups and projects

There is no specific or recommended way to go about this. It depends on the circumstances or opportunities available to you at the time. You may already have a potential project in mind,

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“We were keen to involve groups that we felt were currently underrepresented in our regular visitor demographic. We felt that young people and communities within the areas of multiple deprivation are currently under-represented. Previous focus groups have shown that these groups have felt that the garden is ‘not for them’. We want to encourage people from all backgrounds to visit the garden.”

Royal botanic Gardens Edinburgh,
The Edible gardening project.

in which case you would be looking for a compatible group in your community. Or you could start by looking at gaps in your visitor profiles and examining potential social or environmental issues that concern these underrepresented groups and also are capable of being addressed in a joint project. The onus is on you to reach out to them. Then you

could start developing project concepts with them, working from the ground up.

Think about the following:

- **The wider organisation, mission and objectives of your garden as well as its social responsibilities.** Some botanic gardens/arboreta are government-funded and may have to meet legislative obligations, such as widening access to non-traditional audiences like ethnic minorities and people with disabilities. If botanic gardens are supposed to be open to the public they need to encourage everyone to visit and not just a narrow segment of the community .
- **What has your site got to offer and how might it benefit your community partners?** Gardens are seen as tranquil environments that encourage restful contemplation and may therefore be regarded as suitable for people with therapeutic needs – i.e mental health issues or addiction problems.

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A group from Bristol Drugs Project at Westonbirt Arboretum.

- **What about physical access?** This is an essential concern for many people with restricted mobility.
- **What benefits could accrue to your organisation from working with community groups?** Think long term. Engaging with new audiences creates opportunities for staff training and development and enhances the potential for meaningful engagement with other disenfranchised parts of the community.
- **Look at your current visitor profile and identify gaps in the audience.** You may choose to work with audiences that are currently under-represented in your garden – people with disabilities, school groups, elderly people?
- **What are the demographic characteristics of the group?** Look at factors such as age, educational background, ethnicity, religion and language.
- **Are there any geographical factors?** Where are your target groups located?
- **How interested and committed are your target group?** Try to meet ordinary members of the community as well as group and community leaders to

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gauge their initial attitude to the garden and/or the project.

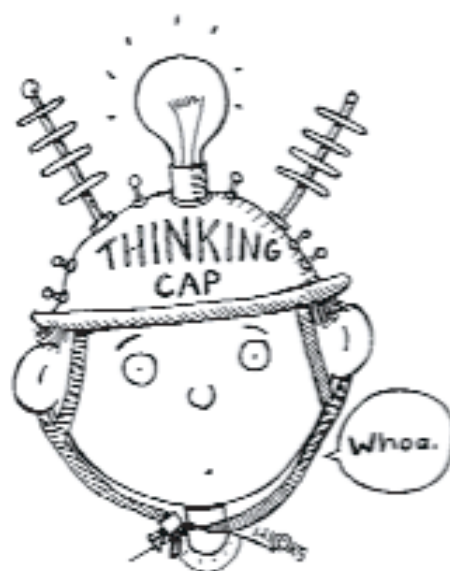
● **Exploit existing personal contacts wherever possible.** Take advantage, where you can, of any established relationships that your garden staff may have in the community. Informal contacts with local community groups, for example, may lead the way to more formal working partnerships. Personal knowledge may also offer useful insights into particular groups and facilitate access to them.

● **There's nothing wrong in approaching community groups you know or have worked with before.**

Exploiting existing relationships may be a sensible option, especially if your project is time-limited.

● **Don't overlook formal relationships with government, local authority, social welfare or other community organisations.** These may well open doors to the kind of community groups you are looking for.

● **Think about how you are going to approach your target group.** With hard-to-reach groups you may have to employ different strategies from the ones you generally use. Are there particular cultural or language issues to keep in mind? How do these groups usually engage with the community at large? Don't ignore the networking potential of meetings and local events and language or religion-specific forums – social media and local radio, for example – are potentially valuable.



2. Working in partnership

Forming partnerships with community groups and the organisations that work with them requires patience, tact and determination. Since these are the pivotal relationships in GSR, it's important to get them right from the start.

Setting up your partnership

Arrange meetings with the group leaders to discuss potential projects, their expectations and also to plan any joint activities. It makes sense to have your discussions before any funding proposals are submitted so that the views of your potential partners may be incorporated in the project from its inception.

Group or community leaders are key potential GSR partners because their influence may be essential in encouraging wider group involvement in the project. They may also be able to mobilise logistic support and access



Asian Women's Group at Westonbirt.

'Initially we spoke with group leaders to gauge interest and discuss our plans. All the group leaders proved absolutely essential to the success of the project.

Following this we went along to sessions in the community to discuss the project with group members and introduce ourselves. We felt that meeting them in their own settings would ensure that they felt comfortable. If we were to develop another project we would lengthen this stage of the project as we found that a single session was not really sufficient. Several of the group leaders had quite strong opinions about what was / wasn't feasible in relation to their group and sometimes these thoughts differed from what we were hearing from the participants themselves'

Westonbirt, The National Arboretum, Hidden voices project.

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'Feeling Green' at University of Leicester Botanic Garden.

resources from within their communities. Remember also to keep in mind the cultural and societal sensibilities of your target group or community. It's very likely, for example, that your garden is seen to be situated in mainstream society, whereas your potential partners

may see themselves positioned out on the margins of society – or not even belonging at all.

Recognise that your garden and your potential partners are starting from quite different positions, organisationally and culturally, with distinct values and objectives. Discuss and negotiate any differences as you begin to establish your partnership so that both sides are clear about what you are getting into. Look for common ground, address any ambiguity and be clear that you both understand and agree on the project objectives.

Try and ensure that you meet all the participants during the planning process. We've seen why getting the group leaders on board early is important, but it's essential that you cast your net as widely as possible to achieve the maximum buy-in from individual group members before the project begins.

How to Grow your Social Role

Use your meetings to estimate the participant skills and abilities, as well as their interests and expectations. What do they want to get out of any collaboration? Talking to individuals may yield a greater understanding than you may have achieved by simply talking to community or group leaders. This may be particularly relevant if you are thinking of working with disability groups where individual disability levels may vary.

Partnership benefits and challenges

By partnering organisations that have expertise in working with their user groups, e.g. teachers, youth workers, language therapists, you get important support for planning but also in delivering the sessions. And because these organisations are already engaged with the participants, they can help in addressing individual needs and requirements. Partner organisations may also be able to offer specific

“A particular benefit was bringing together our existing volunteers with the community participants as this really challenged the stereotypes held by both sides – for example several Bristol Drugs Project (BDP) participants said that they were surprised (and pleased) to be treated as ‘normal’ by volunteers, while several of our volunteers were surprised by the back stories of some of the BDP members.”

Westonbirt, The National Arboretum, Hidden voices project.

training on how to engage with their particular user groups.

Working with other community groups may also create among garden staff an awareness of the social or other issues they face and foster understanding and the development of positive attitudes

How to Grow your Social Role



Arts and crafts at University of Leicester Botanic Garden.

towards them. This is a highly effective way of breaking down barriers and challenging stereotypes, leading to greater social cohesion.

Don't forget!

■ **Make sure that the facilities are appropriate** for the community groups and ensure that access is possible – toilets, spaces where activities will take place. Be mindful of any physical or cognitive impairments among the participants and be sensitive to their religious or cultural sensibilities. Talk to the participants and their group leaders to make sure you are fully aware of the challenges so that you can take steps to address them.

■ **Get to know your participants** and any challenges they face (e.g. physical, mental, social) in order to match the activities with their interests, skills and abilities. Don't make any assumptions – visually impaired people may also face mobility challenges, for example.

■ **Maintaining good communication is essential.** Make sure that you've got the leaders' personal contact details (i.e. e-mail address and mobile phone number) and agree a protocol for communicating between the garden and the group. Ensure that you remain in open and continuing contact with the group for the duration of the project. Talk to the group leaders about how they in turn will communicate with their colleagues on project-related matters.

■ **Make sure that contact details are kept up to date.** Remember that in schools or other educational institutions project responsibility may shift from one individual to another and that contact may be interrupted by holidays or other

How to Grow your Social Role

calendar events. This may apply to other groups too.

■ **Plan your contact time with the groups carefully.** Monthly visits, for example, require effective contact between visits. It is your responsibility to ensure that the relationship momentum is kept going.

■ **Be collaborative.** Growing the social role and developing partnerships with community groups requires a collaborative approach to community

“We found that it was harder to communicate with the school; they had lots of staff changes throughout the project and the lead contact was not the same person that attended with the groups. In hindsight we should have made more of an effort to communicate more closely with one named individual.”

Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh,
Edible Gardening project.

engagement in which you listen to your community group and work with them to develop joint projects. Given the propensity of gardens – and other institutions – for one-off visitor models this may impel garden staff to embark on a steep learning curve!

■ **Ensure that your potential community partners are genuinely interested in working with your garden.** Developing an application process for recruiting the community groups, or setting up a Memorandum of Understanding requiring resources from the community group may ensure its commitment to the project.

■ **Be wary,** however, of **hidden agendas.** You may come across some community groups who express an interest in your proposal because it addresses agendas of their own, rather than it representing a genuine determination on their part to embrace the current project’s ethos and objectives.

How to Grow your Social Role

3. Community engagement

Growing the social role of a botanic garden and collaborating on projects with community groups calls for a mindset that differs from the 'chalk and talk' didacticism of pre-planned sessions familiar to many gardens.

Community engagement is not about offering pre-determined activities to participants, but demands instead a readiness to listen to their needs and interests and a willingness to encourage their influence on the project. To this end it should be incorporated from the beginning and sustained throughout the project's duration. However the extent to which the community may be involved at any particular time may depend on such factors as time commitments,

The terms 'community engagement', 'community participation' and 'community involvement' are used interchangeably

availability of funding and the difficulty of the project.

Plan your approach to community engagement carefully and be prepared to be flexible in order to deal with unexpected contingencies. How much involvement in the project you are able to encourage and when and where it occurs may be determined by the complexity of the project or the capacity of the participants at any particular stage.

So how, and in what way, could your target community get involved in the project? One way to think about this is to construct a 'ladder' of participation (Wilcox, 1994) with the rungs climbing from information and consultation to substantial support for community initiatives. Remember that the higher rungs need not necessarily be 'better', so a great deal depends on the particular circumstances of the project.

How to Grow your Social Role

As a general rule, effective participation is most likely when the different interests involved in a project or programme are satisfied with the level at which they are involved.

Levels of community engagement

- Providing information (telling people what will happen).
 - Consultation (offering options and receiving feedback).
 - Deciding together (opportunities for ideas/joint decisions).
 - Acting together (taking joint decisions forward in partnership).
 - Supporting independent community interests (providing support to organisations to develop their agenda).
- (based on Wilcox, 1994)

A recent report on the nature and effectiveness of the community engagement practices of museums and galleries in the UK (Lynch, 2011, pp.12-13) highlighted that “for most of the

“Community engagement is the process of working collaboratively with and through groups of people affiliated by geographic proximity, special interest, or similar situations to address issues affecting the well-being of those people. It is a powerful vehicle for bringing about environmental and behavioural changes that will improve the health of the community and its members.”

(Fawcett et al., 1995).

organisations, engagement is ‘contained’ at the level of ‘consultation’ rather than ‘collaboration’, and even consultation is not always what it seems... A number of similar examples ... showed that when museums use public participation simply as a means to rubber-stamp existing plans, they are in danger of not only disillusioning participants but robbing people of their

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Case study: The Hidden Voices model at Westonbirt Arboretum

Project idea/aim: 'to engage with communities that do not visit Westonbirt currently using a collaborative approach that enables us to develop a shared understanding of trees and what they mean to society.'

Community groups: 'Awaz Utaoh' Asian women group, Bristol Drugs Project, Stroud Macular Disease Society

We used a step-by-step approach – which on the whole we felt went well and created a genuinely collaborative approach to decision making about what we would do in each session. From the start we felt that it was really important to allow the participants to decide where the project went – and this meant the project changed and grew for example inclusion of family sessions, greenwood working activities etc.

- Initial discussion (at the community venue) – introduce ourselves, Westonbirt and the project – aim to build interest among participants
- Discovery/orientation visits (sessions 1/2) – giving groups the chance to get to know Westonbirt better and try out different sorts of activities. We carried out discussions with each group to then plan the content for the remaining visits
- Activity sessions – (sessions 3/4) – delivering agreed activities. We found that a mixture of walks with activities and hands on creative crafts was a nice balance. Each activity also tied into deepening understanding / appreciation of trees
- Creative project (sessions 5/6) – one of the parts of the project we were keen to develop was a creative legacy element for each group where participants contributed to Westonbirt for example through provision of photos, recipes, trail etc. This was partially successful as some groups were more interested in this than others. For example with the MDS we carried out small group discussions to get their input for a sensory trail and on signage but the participants were not as keen to be involved in the actual production of the trail – which we have produced separately.

active agency as citizens, and preventing them from realising their capabilities. A community partner noted:

“People would like to be more involved in the actual processes – they don't always feel their ideas are listened to.”

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Calendula sp. grown from seed at Upper Horfield Community Garden.

Other questions:

- At what phase of the project should I encourage community engagement?
- What level of community engagement should I encourage?
- What methods should I adopt?

During the Communities in Nature programme 2011-2012 four UK botanic gardens piloted small-scale projects that involved their local communities in different ways. Community engagement included discussing and planning the

activities with the community leaders and getting direct feedback from the participants on the sort of project activities they would like to get involved in. another initiative launched with a set of preplanned activities that were later adapted to respond to participants' needs and abilities.

Community engagement methods

Community engagement may range from information provision or consultation to forming a partnership.

Several strategies may be used:

- Newsletter, internet based information, facebook, blog
- Questionnaires, graffiti walls, response cards
- Public meetings, conferences
- Interviews, role play, storytelling and other face to face techniques
- Focus and working groups, seminars, panels , open space workshop, 'World Cafe'

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Case study: The Bristol Community Plant Collection model

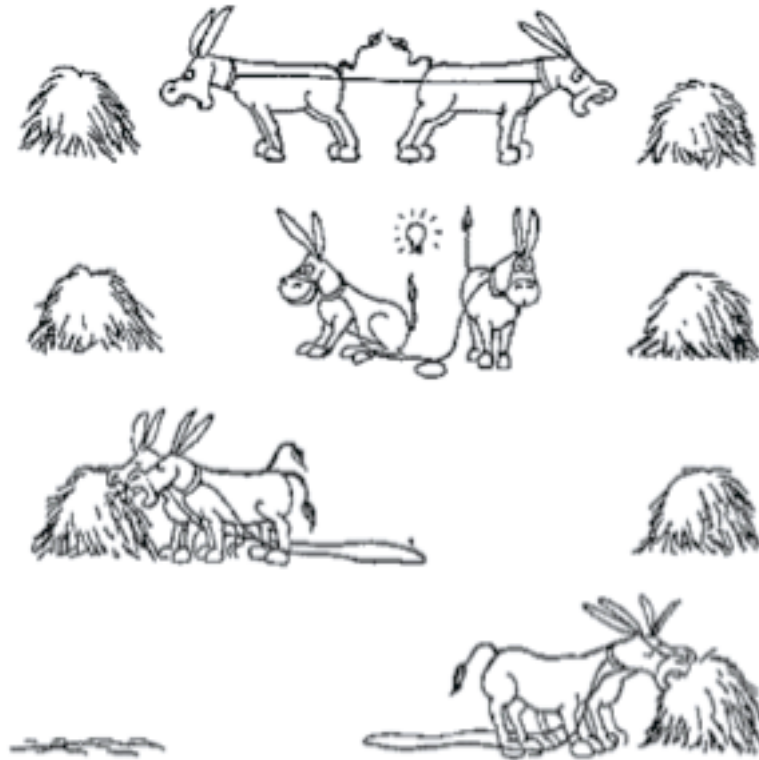
Project aim: 'To pilot and assess the first model for a Dispersed National Collection of hardy annual garden plants through the empowerment of, and social engagement with, community gardeners and groups. *Community groups:* Avon group for Young people, Bannerman Road Children's Centre, Bristol primary schools, Chard Court sheltered housing, Robinson House Care Home, Severn Project, Upper Horfield Community Garden.



The lack of a working blueprint meant that we were flexible in our approach to this project. Apart from the more structured introduction to the project and training, the rest of the interactions were informal – listening to the groups, seeing where their interests lay and trying to tailor an aspect of the project to their needs. A more prescriptive programme would probably have been rejected. Other elements of the project included:

- Initial contact either directly with communities or through third parties (Neighbourhood Partnerships) to announce the project and to build interest among potential participants.
- Training of the groups at Bristol Zoo Gardens Nursery or on-site when appropriate (especially important with school groups so pupils have a context for their involvement).
- Early site visits to deliver growing equipment, discuss any concerns and, where necessary repeat training.
- On-going communication with the groups. Regular e-mails to catch up with their progress, Facebook, phone calls making sure that they are aware that we are always available for help.
- Negotiating regular site visits to partners – to collect plants for display in the Zoo or with third parties (BGCI and film maker)
- Holding an end-of-project celebration for the participant groups, where BZG to thanked them for their involvement. This was also an opportunity to acknowledge and thank key supporters and facilitators and also to promote the project further.
- Growing groups delivered seeds collected throughout the process to grow next year.
- Contact is still maintained on a more casual basis with those groups who have expressed a desire to be involved next year, to update them on the project.

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● Action research – Some methods are more participative than others.

Newsletters and questionnaires, for example, or information panels, entail little or no face-to-face activity but may potentially reach a large number of people. Public meetings and other one-off events may similarly attract large audiences. On the other hand, focus groups, action research projects and

role-play are innately more participative but inevitably engage with fewer people.

The particular circumstances of your project and your type of partner will determine the extent of their participation and the strategies you employ. Language barriers, age, cultural inhibitions, physical disabilities,

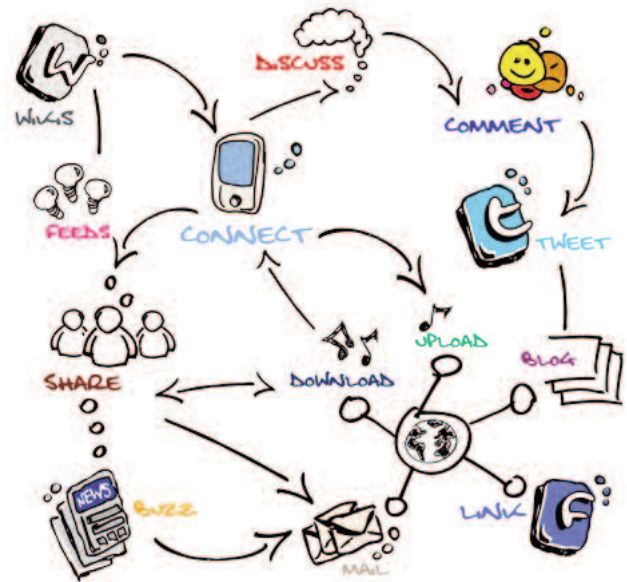
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“We tried the World Café as a way of discussing particular issues. There was some success in using the World Café with Bristol Drugs Project participants, since they were comfortable with this method which they had used before in their therapy sessions.

However it proved difficult with the Macular Disease Society group as the participants were not used to providing feedback and were undemonstrative – often making comments such as ‘Whatever you think would be best’.

With the ‘Awaz Utaoh’ Asian women group this also proved difficult due to challenges with language and group dynamics (often the groups were not good at listening to one another).”

Westonbirt, The National Arboretum, Hidden Voices project.



educational or other special needs are all examples of the kind of factors that will influence your approach. This is where having good relationships with group or community leaders is so important because they will be able to share their experiences and detailed understanding of their group with you.

Lessons from Communities in Nature:

Informal small group discussions.

Engagement methods do not have to be complicated. Allowing time and space to talk at length with the groups and build a

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relationship is crucial. This may be at the beginning of the project but could also continue as it runs its course, over lunch and refreshments' time. Small group discussions may be facilitated by a staff member or a volunteer. Prepare a set of questions or ideas to put to the groups. Inviting volunteers to sit in on

informal conversations can be useful for providing ideas for discussions.

On-line communications. Establish other ways to keep in touch with the groups when face-to-face meetings are not taking place (by using e-mails or by developing a Facebook page). These could serve to inform the groups and

Community engagement methods – recommended readings

These on-line resources offer tools that may help you engage effectively with your community groups. You will also find issues that you need to be aware of when you encourage community participation and learn from other projects' successes and challenges. Which tools are most appropriate to use with the group you want to work with? What type of participants' involvement do you want to achieve in the different stages of the project?

◆ Eden project: *Engaging Communities: Where is the heart of your community*. Available at: <http://www.edenproject.com/whats-it-all-about/places-and-regeneration/creative-community-engagement-case-studies>

◆ *The Scottish Government's list of methods to engage with communities*
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/People/engage/HowToGuide/Techniques>

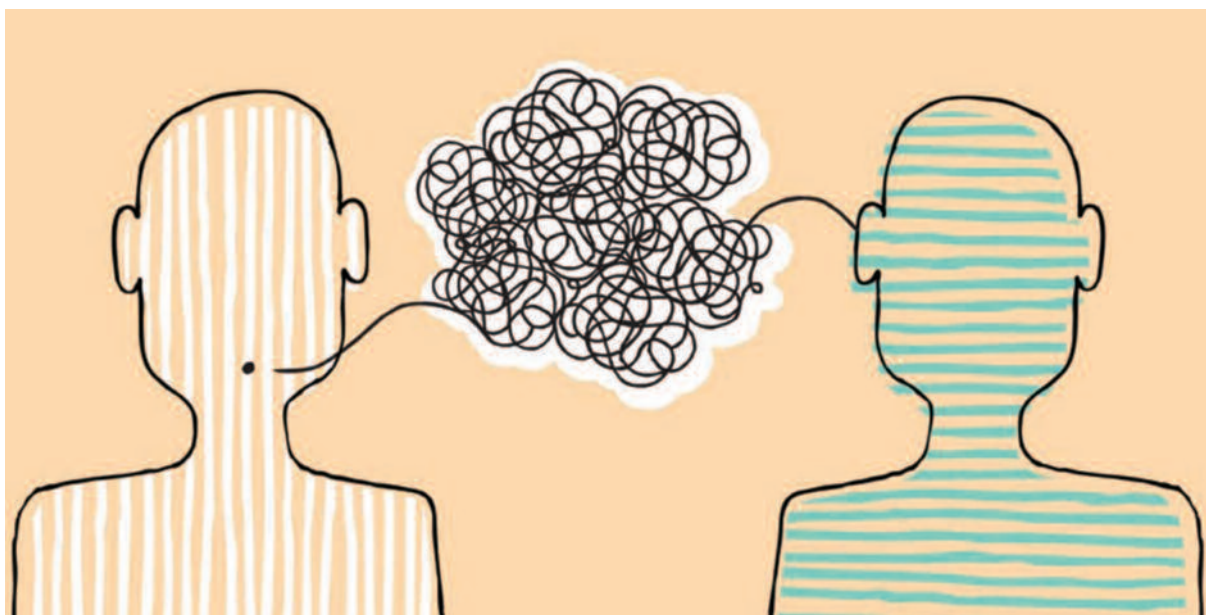
◆ *List of public participation methods by People and Participation*: <http://www.peopleandparticipation.net/display/Methods/List+of+methods+with+brief+descriptions>

◆ Lynch, B. (2011). *Whose Cake is it Anyway? A Collaborative Investigation into Engagement and Participation in 12 Museums in the UK*. London: Paul Hamlyn Foundation.

◆ Heritage Lottery Fund (2010). *Thinking about...Community Participation*. http://www.hlf.org.uk/HowToApply/furtherresources/Documents/Thinking_about_community_participation.pdf

◆ *Equality and Human Rights Commission (2009)*. Good practice in community engagement from an equality perspective. Equality and Human Rights Commission http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/uploaded_files/good_practice_in_community_engagement.pdf

How to Grow your Social Role



enable them to ask for your support when required. If you're thinking of using on-line/social media, pay attention to access issues and check whether your participants are familiar with these methods. Older participants may prefer face-to-face contact, while some groups, schools for example, may have restricted internet access.

Concept mapping. A very useful approach if you are planning project activities with your group. Participants are asked to respond to a statement, individually or in small groups, and then brainstorm ideas and issues related to

this. It is an effective way of gauging their level of understanding so that you can design the activities accordingly.

World Café. This is a flexible model for facilitating group discussion and interaction. Small groups are tasked with addressing questions specific to each group. Periodically the groups are reconstituted to allow participants to engage with different colleagues and questions. During the concluding whole-group 'harvest' session, participants are invited to share insights and reflections on their conversations with the rest of the group.

4. Incorporating environmental issues in a social inclusion project

Many environmental and social issues can be seen as two sides of the same coin, which begs the question: is it possible to develop projects that deliver on both? It's a dilemma confronting any botanic garden looking to move on from straightforward plant conversation to growing its social role. The Communities in Nature Partners faced this challenge, as did gardens from elsewhere in the world who are already successfully implementing social inclusion programmes.

Matching your environmental themes

to the participants. Make the earliest assessment possible, ideally during the planning phase, of your participants' capabilities – their levels of understanding, skills and interests. There's no point in plunging straight into complex environmental issues and then discovering too late that

"We incorporated 'green gardening' practices into all of the sessions covering organic methods, composting, seasonal food and so on.

The participants had a session about composting – visiting our composting area at the RBGE and discussing why we use it and why it's good environmental practice.

In another session the group sowed our wildflower meadow in the fruit garden.

This enabled us to talk about the importance of pollinators and wild habitats. While environmental practices were referenced throughout the project, I think we should have put more emphasis on the issues.

More sessions like our composting one would have been beneficial."

Jenny Foulkes, Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, The Edible Gardening project.

How to Grow your Social Role

Case Study: Chicago Botanic Garden

'While it may not always be obvious, issues of social equity are intimately interwoven with environmental issues in the sense that underserved communities often have insufficient or deteriorating infrastructure, reduced access to natural resources such as fresh food or water, clean air, and green space, and lack high quality social services such as health care and education.

As botanic gardens work with communities to develop locally relevant programmes, it is entirely appropriate to tie in environmental issues that are connected to the needs that the community has identified. In fact, communicating about sustainable practices in pursuit of something that is important to the community is far more likely to have a lasting impact than conservation messages outside of a meaningful context.

The challenge for botanic gardens is one of sensitivity, balance, and self-awareness – sensitivity to the concerns of community members, balancing programmatic goals with relevant conservation messages, and remaining aware of our own biases to ensure that we are truly responding to community needs rather than superimposing our own beliefs on a community-focused programme.

Chicago Botanic Garden focuses our community outreach activities in two areas that have been identified locally as community needs – science education and food security – both of which implicitly suggest conservation messages.

Access to high quality education, particularly in the sciences, is limited in many lower-income urban communities in the U.S. The Science Career Continuum (SCC) provides a programmatic pathway that supports underserved students of colour in achieving environmental science careers – serving the community by providing academic enrichment and career training for youth, and addressing conservation goals by increasing diversity in the sciences. The SCC is made up of three main programmes: Science First (ages 12-15), College First (ages 15-18) and Undergraduate Internships (university students). These programmes offer a continuum of in-depth science immersion experiences that help students reach for their potential and achieve personally and academically, despite challenges encountered in their lives and at under-resourced schools.

Other common concerns in many communities are food security and employment opportunities. In Chicago, food deserts in low-income urban areas severely limit access to healthy, fresh produce, and

How to Grow your Social Role

these same areas often suffer from high unemployment and joblessness. Through sustainable, urban agriculture programs for youth and adults, the Chicago Botanic Garden is working with communities to address both these needs directly in ways that reduce food miles and promote environmentally friendly farming practices.

The Green Youth Farm program offers students the opportunity to learn all aspects of organic farming – from planting seeds to selling it locally at farm stands and markets. Participants learn important entrepreneurship skills as they market and sell their produce. Windy City Harvest extends training in sustainable agriculture to adults. Students receive six months of hands-on instruction in greenhouse and outdoor growing practices, followed by a three-month paid internship. After satisfactory completion of the curriculum and training requirements, students achieve certification in sustainable urban horticulture and urban agriculture’

Jennifer Schwarz Ballard,
Chicago Botanic Garden.

they don't have any idea what you're talking about! You may need to tailor your language appropriately and take a realistic view of your timetable in order

to put together a viable, mutually beneficial project.

What if the community groups have their own agenda and environmental learning is not a priority? Don't

confuse community groups with school visitors, for example, who come with a strong learning agenda. For some groups, spending time in a beautiful, tranquil setting with other people and perhaps taking part in some practical activities is more important than environmental learning. Hard-to-reach



Visitor from the Macular Disease Society at Westonbirt.

How to Grow your Social Role

Eden Project: “focus on the positive”

“Environmental issues do not exist in a vacuum, they are intertwined with people’s daily lives. Part of our role is to demonstrate how they are connected and how the small decisions we make every day as individuals can have a significant impact on the community as a whole.

Environmental issues can be easily embedded in community gardening projects and often come up in discussion when doing a seemingly unrelated activity, digging up a leek for instance can lead to conversations about the use of pesticides vs. organic growing, food miles or climate change.

We find it’s best not to be preachy or negative but focus on the positive contribution people can make to the environment; looking after plants is after all a great place to start.

There are a range of tangible environmental issues you can incorporate into a garden programme that will help make a real contribution to the community and provide insight into broader environmental issues, for example a food growing project can help tackle food security and climate change by reducing food miles, water shortages can be tackled with a water butt, and wildlife conservation can be encouraged through companion planting and habitat creation. Showing people how easy it is to take ownership and responsibility for their green spaces can help inspire them to care more about the environment in which they live, leading to greater social cohesion, and stronger communities are more likely to be able to face up to environmental challenges!”

Juliet Rose, The Eden Project

groups may have personal or health issues that, for them, take priority over wider environmental concerns.

Participants in the Community in Nature

project prioritised a range of objectives that included recovering from drug dependency, integrating into society or simply staying active and involved. It

How to Grow your Social Role



Participant from the Bristol Drugs Project learning woodland management at Westonbirt.

may be therefore that the garden has to subordinate its own environmental objectives in order to deliver on the social agenda of its partner. Growing a viable social role is a long-term process, requiring flexibility and compromise in order to build sustainable relationships in the community.

How explicit should environmental issues be in your GSR project?

Botanic gardens are well versed in the didactic methodologies that deliver conventional plant conservation messages to visitors, such as school groups, for example. But it is open to question whether this approach would work in a social inclusion framework, where there is a risk of alienating potential participants unused to, or resistant to, this kind of approach. The challenge for a garden, therefore, is how to make the environmental component of the project relevant to its social inclusion themes.

One way to do this may be to offer hands-on activities with real-life examples of the themes in question.

Another is to raise environmental issues informally, during practical, socially-oriented activities, and then inviting the group to make relevant connections. Flexibility and a pragmatic

How to Grow your Social Role

sensitivity to your group's personality should therefore govern your collaboration with them.

Potential for environmental learning in a social inclusion project

Environmental learning comes in all shapes and sizes and gardens may have different objectives. Some may prioritise environmental literacy (ie understanding the impact of climate change) or focus on behavioural change (ie reducing food miles by growing food locally). Whatever path you take, ensure that you are clear about what kind of environmental learning you have in mind and think about how you incorporate this in a social inclusion project. The Communities in Nature programme suggests that projects with a strong environmental focus that engage communities in practical conservation work can achieve a significant social impact (see Bristol Community Plant Collection case study, p22).

5. Project management tips

In growing your garden's social role, especially when you are starting from scratch, it's advisable to start small and gradually build up to more ambitious projects as you gain in experience and expertise. But irrespective of the size of your project, there are some general guidelines that should help ensure its success. If we understand a project as 'a series of connected events that happen within a defined time period in order to generate a particular output', we can look at its life-cycle in three phases: **Planning, Delivery and Evaluation.**

Planning

5 questions to address during project planning (Goulding, 2012, p.5)

- What will the finished project look like?
- When must it be completed?
- Why are we doing it?
- How are we going to do it?
- Who is involved in the project?

How to Grow your Social Role

10 tips for planning a social inclusion project

- Spend time planning the project and completing a Gantt chart – but don't expect to follow it exactly. Agree the dates of workshop sessions and meetings at the start of the planning process. Map out each session so that you know what you are trying to achieve but be prepared to be flexible – as the project progresses and your understanding of the participants grows, you may need to adapt and modify.
- Gantt charts are useful because they identify who is doing what and when. Make sure it's displayed where everyone can see it. Mark achievements and milestones – useful for when progress seems slow or non-existent!
- Keep project activities in perspective with your other work responsibilities. Flexibility and a readiness to innovate are key qualities.
- Where possible, involve other staff members in order to share the workload.
- Allow enough time for planning and preparation. And make sure, particularly, that the participants have enough time and support for them to have an effective input into the project outline – this will pay off in the delivery sessions. Don't just present your project to the group and expect them to accept it.
- When allocating time for activities, keep in mind your group's specific requirements. Restricted mobility groups, for example, may need more time to get around the site.
- For multiple sessions with the same group, book all their sessions in at the start of the project.
- Good relationships are essential for effective community projects, so stay engaged with your group leaders and participants. Keep communications open and unambiguous. Make sure you have a reliable point of contact with your project group.
- For outdoor sessions, always have a wet-weather Plan B!

How to Grow your Social Role

● How will your group travel to the garden? Make sure that transport plans are agreed and incorporated from the start of the project.

Delivery - managing risk

Risk is the degree of probability that something could go wrong with your project. To help manage your risk, why

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Actions
Community group's needs not being met.	Medium	High	Allow enough time during planning to gauge participant needs and discuss with leaders. Monitor throughout project whether needs are being met and address any issues with stakeholders.
Low participant numbers.	Medium	High	Seek to over-recruit to ensure adequate participant numbers. Ensure project is relevant and interesting to participants. Maintain good communication with groups.
Group leaders with fixed ideas about group preferences and opinions. Their views may be coloured by experience of previous projects.	Low	Medium	Encourage dialogue with group leaders and participants and use active listening to understand their needs. Establish a relationship of trust and respect.
Garden volunteers make ill-informed or inappropriate comments when working with certain community groups.	Low	Medium	Choose your volunteers carefully and match them to project requirements. Provide appropriate training where necessary and make sure they understand what is expected from them.
Communication problems with groups lacking strong leadership or where leaders change during project.	Medium	High	Agree a Memorandum of Understanding with each project group, to clarify respective roles and responsibilities. Try to ensure buy-in to project from groups by securing their contribution to resources.

How to Grow your Social Role

not draw up, with your project tea, a simple table of risks with an estimation of how likely they are to happen, their potential impact and any actions you can take to minimise them.

Solving common problems

Perhaps one of the risks you anticipated may have materialised, or an unforeseen problem has arisen during the project (Goulding 2012).

Problem	Solution
An initially promising and co-operative community group has become difficult to engage with or hard to reach.	Hold face-to-face meeting with community leaders and participants. Address any questions or concerns swiftly. Tactfully but firmly explain what the project requires of them, ask them to re-examine their commitment to it and set a realistic deadline for their response. Nb: underline the importance of the project to the community/group.
Group or community leaders are dominating or interfering in the group, sending it off-task or in danger of losing focus.	Talk to the leaders in question and, while acknowledging their community leadership role, emphasise that the effective delivery of the project requires the unfettered collaboration of all the participants. Ask them to respect the group's authority in the project, in line with your Memorandum of Understanding. Discuss the situation with your team so that you may anticipate any future difficulties.
The project is running behind schedule	Review your project plan carefully. Have you allowed for any delays? Where is the problem? Which tasks are taking longer than expected? How will the delay impact on the overall project? Revise and amend your plan where necessary to get the project back on track. Make sure that everyone is signed up to this new plan.
You are facing a budget overrun – for example, higher than expected costs in providing disabled access	This is where you have to get creative! Look at what other gardens or visitor attractions have done. Could you use alternative, cheaper materials? Or what about a different, more accessible plot, building or location?

How to Grow your Social Role

Evaluation

Evaluation is an evidence gathering exercise intended to achieve understanding of the project – its planning, design, process and outcomes. As well as informing your own practice and project management skills, it can measure the project's impact on the participants and other stakeholders. The evaluation findings may also be useful in future project or fundraising proposals.

Evaluation may be **formative** (undertaken during the project) to enable in-project adjustments or **summative** (conducted at the end of

the project) to assess outcomes and impact. Although there are many useful evaluation toolkits and books available, (see panel below) our focus here will be on the lessons of the Communities in Nature evaluations.

In choosing your evaluation method, bear in mind the time and resources you have available. There is no point, for example, in gathering audio-recorded data if don't have time to transcribe the recordings and analyse them.

Other factors:

- As a general rule, participants are more interested in the project activities

How to evaluate your project – useful readings

Look at the following resources on how to evaluate public engagement activities and projects. They provide a useful introduction for developing your evaluation strategy. Which methods will you use to gather evidence of your project's progress and outcomes?

■ Foster, H. (2008) *Evaluation toolkit for museum practitioners*. The East of England Museum Hub. Norwich. Available at: <http://www.audienceslondon.org/1979/our-resources/evaluation-toolkit-for-museum-practitioners.html>

■ Research Councils UK (2011) *Evaluation: Practical Guidelines: A guide for evaluating public engagement activities*. Research Councils UK. Swindon. Available at: <http://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/how/guides/evaluation/resources>

How to Grow your Social Role

than the evaluation. So think about how you can use activity outcomes to evidence the project impacts.

- When consulting your participants, use evaluation methods appropriate to their abilities or you may end up with little or no meaningful data from them.
- Don't rely on the group leaders to collect evaluation forms from the participants. They may have different priorities or not understand the importance of your evaluation.
- Delivering a session and conducting an evaluation at the same time is challenging, to say the least, and may negatively impact on both processes. Therefore arrange therefore for a colleague or volunteer to gather evaluation data during the activities.
- Get your groups on-side by explaining the significance of the evaluation and what it will involve. Make sure that any evaluation documents you give them are short and easy to understand.

Evaluation methods – what went well and what could have been better?

Wherever possible, engage an **observer** to take notes and photographs during the sessions. It's a tried and tested procedure that instills valuable objectivity in the evaluation process.

Video is a highly effective tool for canvassing participants' views, both during and at the end of the project. The evidence of the Communities in Nature projects is that participants felt confident and actually enjoyed providing their feedback in front of the camera.

On a note of caution, however, don't be surprised if you find some participants are reluctant or even hostile to appearing in front of a camera. They may have religious or cultural objections, perhaps, or maybe an unwillingness to be identified publicly, either with the project or because of some other personal matter.

How to Grow your Social Role

Response cards with three or four short project-relevant questions are useful for pre-and post- project feedback from the same participants.

Use a short **questionnaire**, completed at the end of the session, to evaluate one-off workshops.

Reporting the results

While collecting and analysing data is critical to your project evaluation, equally important is writing and publishing an evaluation report.

Read the evaluation report on the two pilot projects of BGCI's *Growing the Social Role of Botanic Gardens* initiative. What questions guided the evaluation and how was the evidence gathered? How were the findings presented in the report?

Research Centre for Museums and Galleries (RCMG), University of Leicester (2011) *Growing the Social Role: Partnerships in the community*. BGCI, London. Available at: http://www.bgci.org/files/Worldwide/Education/Social_inclusion/final_summary_report_gsrbgs.pdf

Audio recorded data is very useful. To simplify and focus the evaluation, carry out semi-structured interviews, using trained volunteers or staff equipped with an evaluation brief and a list of indicative questions.

Or encourage the participants to interview each other, after providing them with appropriate training and relevant questions.

Discreetly assessing the emotional impact of projects using **creative arts** – such as poetry and painting – is another option, although this approach may be less effective with visually impaired or non-native language speaking groups.

Focus group interviews at the end of the project are valuable. For groups with learning or communication difficulties the assistance of language and speech therapists to design and conduct the interviews may be necessary.

6. What skills are required to develop a garden's social role?

A range of skills not always found among botanic garden staff are critical to the effective delivery of a garden's social role. While there is no implied criticism of garden staff here, it does highlight the cultural and organisational journey that a garden may have to take in order to achieve what can be an

'intensive, long term and difficult task'. (Dodd & Jones, 2010).

So before embarking on your GSR project, conduct a skills audit among your staff to identify any potential gaps in your organisation's skill-set. Then look to fill these gaps, either by bringing in new staff with experience in community engagement or providing training opportunities to your colleagues who will

Communities in Nature: useful project skills	
Project management	Creativity
Evaluation	Respect
Working with special groups such as marginalised or vulnerable young people, people with special needs or disabilities, ethnic groups	Patience
Public speaking	Humour
Teaching (lesson planning, writing objectives, demonstration skills)	Calmness, staying cool in a crisis
Active listening	Adaptable and able to cope with the unexpected

How to Grow your Social Role

“Vital to the success of the ‘Community Greening’ initiative has been the personalities and skills of the gardens staff - friendly, calm, non-judgemental, and skilled horticulturalists.

Their relationship with the community members is one of trust – paramount to the ongoing success of the project.”

Janelle Hatherly, Royal Botanic Gardens, Sydney

be involved in community projects. Some skills may be acquired during the project itself, so long as there is a core of suitably trained staff to mentor and impart their knowledge to colleagues. Or there may have been other opportunities for socially relevant work where the skills acquired there are transferable to the current GSR programme. Formal training is an option, of course, as is partnering other organisations who are experienced in the field. Although you

must ensure that your team has the interpersonal, communication and management skills necessary to mobilise and work with community groups, don't forget that they have to demonstrate botanical expertise as well. Feedback from community groups has reported positive responses to working alongside experts and suggests that it's a key motivator in their acquisition of skills and knowledge.



Students from the Youth Off The Streets (YOTS) programme building a community garden in southwest Sydney.

7. Turning a pilot project into a sustainable GSR programme

Growing a botanic garden's social role is not about running a one-off project with the local community; it is about developing the organisation's capacity to work long term on addressing both social and environmental issues that are relevant to the community. Running a small-scale community project is a recommended way to start but the main challenge is what happens after the project's completion. How can you ensure that your organisation will continue in the future with this new area of work?

During a community project make sure that you generate **outputs** that will enable you to work with community groups in the future. These outputs may include workshops, new facilities on your site that enable access, professional development of your staff (new skills in the team), or even a new approach to community engagement.

Evaluate your community project and use the results to demonstrate its impact to potential funders. Also use your evaluation results to inform and modify any other socially relevant work that you are undertaking.

Disseminate the activities and results of your project as widely as possible, since this may encourage other groups and organisations to collaborate with you. Securing **media coverage** is also valuable. It increases your visibility as an organisation with a track record and experience in social inclusivity.

When your current GSR project has run its course and if it has been successful, you should have established good relationships with your partners that you'll want to nurture. Keep in contact and sustain the momentum built up during the project by exploring future potential projects and joint fundraising initiatives.

How to Grow your Social Role

GSR projects may bring you into contact with hard-to-reach groups that, perhaps because of challenging social, economic or medical needs or difficult individual circumstances, are too loosely organised and ephemeral in nature. Maintaining an enduring relationship with them may be too problematic for the purposes of your project and you may have to set idealism aside in order to work with groups with whom you have

a more realistic chance of sustained success.

It's no surprise that **adequate funding** is critical to most GSR projects, so bring your organisation's fundraising team (if you have one!) on-board in order to look at future funding initiatives. And don't overlook your membership or Garden Friends either for help.

Without the **support and commitment** of your garden's management and colleagues, your GSR agenda may not get much traction. Community projects depend on building relationships and providing continuous support to the participants and without dedicated staff this cannot be achieved. This is especially important if your projects are being supported by short-term grants. To ensure a sustainable long-term GSR programme, your organisation must be prepared to bridge the funding gaps when they occur and retain skilled staff

“Because grant funding is not continuous and can be short term, it is vital that the organisation is committed to its staff and is willing to bridge funding gaps and provide job security.

Otherwise staff turnover will be high and the quality of projects will suffer. Organisational knowledge and continuity are key to successful community projects.”

Rose, 2012.

How to Grow your Social Role

for continuity and the retention of key skills inside the organisation.

Be adventurous in looking for funding. Investigate government grants and approach private foundations, trusts and individual donors to support different aspects of your social inclusion work. Target regional or national agencies engaged in socially relevant activities with whom you can find common ground. They may be potential project partners and/or funders. The business community may be another useful target, especially if there are commercial organisations keen to develop their social dimension.

Corporate partnerships may open the door to internships in your organisation and even offer employment opportunities to your participants. Look at how you can exploit the commercial potential of your project. Let's say that you are setting up a Social

"It is a constant juggling act but strong consistent relationships with community organizations, local communities and local authorities allows you to check your work is relevant and help identify new opportunities."

Rose, 2012.

Enterprise – a community vegetable garden perhaps, providing employment for people with learning difficulties – you could sell surplus produce through a vegetable box scheme.

Of course, as well as generating income, an initiative like this has to demonstrate its positive impact on your GSR objectives, as well as addressing the concerns of your partner group. So think strategically about the decisions you are facing when making your project choices, in order to maintain their long-term relevance and sustainability.

How to Grow your Social Role

Sustainability of social inclusion work at Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew.

'In order to make the social inclusion programme at Kew sustainable, we worked in partnership with Historic Royal Palaces (HRP); we jointly looked for funding, shared the management of projects and resources. We picked up a lot of expertise and knowledge from HRP and we actually have a MoU, which has been in place for 12 years, for a longer-term relationship to look at the development of community engagement.

So, we have been working together on individual projects for 12 years now. We also shared the post of a community engagement officer. Kew paid for four days a week and HRP paid for one day a week. That meant that we did have dialogue between the two organisations as to how we might structure any work together.

Since that time because attitudes at Kew have changed and we have been looking at how we should be more socially relevant to our local communities, we established a new section, which is called community engagement volunteering. We still maintain the link with HRP co-funding the community engagement officer.

One of the challenges for Kew is that we are a charitable organisation and we get less than half of our funding now from our major sponsor which is the government. And so there is that tension between income generated work and how you manage your social inclusion work.

Maintaining your staff and finding funding is difficult because funding is limited nowadays. You have to be clever about how you integrate it into your broader programmes. Here at Kew, for example, we have started to integrate community engagement in the festivals that we run here, so that work such as developing interpretation for the festival will be co-funded.

We can now present a whole number of social inclusion programmes; we evaluate these so we can actually show continuity of what we have done over the years and what impact that has had both socially and emotionally on people. It's much easier to demonstrate to funders and other Partners now what kind of work we are doing and the successes we have had.

We also produced a brochure which outlines all the social inclusion work and we can use it as a funding document.

So, sustainability has been achieved through integrating community engagement into all the bids that we put in for funding, in sharing and partnership, in making sure that we are bringing together the different strands of this work and redefining and re-engineering how we deliver that social engagement through the broader network of organisations'.

Gail Bromley, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew.

8. Embedding the social role

What inhibits botanic gardens from taking on a greater social role?

According to 'Redefining the Role of Botanic Gardens – towards a new social purpose' (Dodd & Jones, 2010) there are several obstacles to botanic gardens assuming a greater social role. These include:

- **organisational** factors such as lack of capacity and skills,
- an **introspective** management hierarchy,
- problems with staff **motivation** and **training**
- **lack of diversity** in the workforce.

Botanic gardens have traditionally focused on scientific research, conservation, recreation and education. Some newer gardens have broken the mould and embraced a more socially

relevant agenda that addresses the social and environmental challenges of their local communities.

The Eden Project in Cornwall, which opened in 2000, is a case in point. A popular holiday destination, Cornwall paradoxically reports some of the highest social and economic deprivation in Europe. Set in a disused china clay pit, Eden was planned from its inception

“The Eden Project however does not represent the majority of botanic gardens, many of which have a long history with a well defined focus of their activities. In order to develop these gardens’ social role, organisational change is required and in doing so the social role needs to be embedded in the organisation’s policy and operations.”

Dodd & Jones 2012

How to Grow your Social Role



Learning how to plant vegetables at Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh.

as a catalyst for environmental and social regeneration. Ever since, this social agenda has been the cornerstone of Eden's ethos and mission.

But Eden is the exception that proves the rule. The overwhelming majority of gardens, even some of the newer ones, conform to the traditional model outlined above. And these are the gardens most in need of a GSR dimension.

So HOW do you entrench your garden's social role?

■ **Tell your colleagues!** Use every available means to let everyone in the garden know what you're doing in order to get them onside. Your evaluation report is invaluable because it will back up your message. Get on the intranet, if you have one, present your work at staff conferences and departmental meetings and write for your internal magazines or staff newsletters. [And have you updated your garden's website?]

Talk to your senior management colleagues and the garden trustees too, show them your evaluation report and enlist them as social role champions. Senior management buy-in and active support is fundamental to the long term viability of your garden's social role, keeping it on the agenda while the strategic direction of the garden is being shaped.

How to Grow your Social Role

“I think that by reporting the success of this kind of project to our senior management we can raise the profile of such work. By presenting the work at our staff conference, writing in our magazine and telling everyone we can, it will stay fresh in people’s minds.”

Jenny Foulkes, Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh.

■ **Tell everyone else!** Post the news on your website and updating any other social media platforms that your garden uses. Think about blogging or tweeting directly from your GSR activities and upload videos of your project to YouTube.

Contact the conventional media – TV and radio, newspapers, magazines and journals. Put together some lively press releases or offer to supply feature articles (with pictures!).

Social responsibility is intrinsic to many publicly-funded botanic gardens, although this role may have been narrowly or conservatively construed in the past to mean just public access. Use your publicity to demonstrate how your garden is meeting its responsibilities by growing its social role. Make the GSR connection explicit and dynamic.

■ **Create new jobs** that focus on the social role or ensure that social inclusion forms part of any new job description.

■ **Involve as many staff as possible** in socially relevant projects. This will provide them with practical experience and an appreciation of what can be achieved by a botanic garden.

■ **Establish an Access Forum** comprising local organisations that deal with aid and access issues. Set up an application process and interview the potential members of the forum. Recruit

How to Grow your Social Role

“One of the legacies that we expect to come out of the Feel Green project is the appointment of a special gardener, whose responsibility will be for helping people who come to the garden to work as volunteers or in placement schemes. There are many organisations who have people with learning or physical disabilities who are looking to place them in work positions, to gain experience. We’re in discussions with the County Council about a joint funding of this post.”

Richard Gornall, University of Leicester, Botanic Garden.

members with knowledge and expertise in a variety of access issues (e.g. physical and learning difficulties). Timetable regular meetings (quarterly or twice-yearly) and post information about the access forum on the intranet.

■ **Organise a Diversity and Equality group** among members of staff and arrange regular meetings to look at diversity and equality issues inside the organisation.

■ **Set up a Community Engagement Free Access offer** if your botanic garden has an admission charge. Publicise the scheme through local communities and groups.

“The Hidden Voices project has shown staff that the value of Westonbirt’s tree collection to society is more than just a botanical/scientific collection or visitor attraction; in fact it can be used to tackle significant social challenges. We engaged staff from all teams and this changed perceptions on how we use our landscape/trees.”

Ben Oliver, Westonbirt, The National Arboretum.

How to Grow your Social Role

9. Raising your garden's GSR profile

- **Use traditional and social media** to sustain your GSR visibility. Be proactive and energetic. Take the initiative.
- **Incorporate a creative legacy element** to keep your project in the public eye after it finishes. You could, for example, invite your former project group to develop the interpretation of an area in the gardens.
- **Situate on-site projects in public spaces** so that visitors may see what you are doing. Use interpretation panels to explain your community activities.
- **Hold events celebrating your community work** – harvest festivals or final day celebrations of the project. Invite participants and other relevant stakeholders (representatives from other community groups, local authorities etc).
- **Target other potential partners** by promoting your GSR successes to them and demonstrating the projects relevance to their own situation.



- **Organise a stakeholder group** to promote your GSR credentials and advise you on how to secure access to and buy-in from your local communities. Don't simply rely on your marketing and communications team to spread the word about your GSR activities.
- **Use other garden and local events** to showcase your work.
- **Resources and other tangible outcomes** from your GSR activities may be useful to other groups or organisations. Tell them what you have been doing and what is available.
- **Work your networks** in order to tell as many people as possible about your GSR successes.



A moment of reflection. A visitor from the Bristol Drugs Project at Westonbirt Arboretum.

The challenge for botanic gardens ...

“The main challenge is bringing people with you on that journey and helping them to see the relevance of it.

There are still many issues to deal with I’m not saying that everyone is on board yet. There’s still a tendency among some garden people (although far fewer than there used to be) to regard that kind of social development, social justice, social interaction work as “well, that’s that’s ok, that lot over there are dealing with it, it’s nothing to do with me”. They haven’t accepted yet that it has to be absolutely integral to their work in the garden.

However these attitudes are changing, gradually, although it’s a long term process. We need to build people’s expertise and understanding through explanation and dialogue and by demonstrating the impact of GSR, showing how completely relevant it is to their role.”

Gail Bromley, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew

Resources on how to evaluate public engagement programmes

Assessment Tools in Informal Science

<http://www.pearweb.org/atis/>

This website is an on-line resource that provides practitioners and researchers information on how to choose appropriate tools for assessing program quality and measuring performance of informal and out-of-school science programs.

Evaluation toolkit for museum practitioners (2008)

Harriet Foster, Renaissance East of England

http://www.sharemuseumseast.org.uk/shares/resource_34.pdf

This toolkit that has been developed principally for the museum sector contains examples of different methods for evaluating public engagement activities and offers many concrete case studies showcasing evaluation in practice.

Partnerships for learning: a guide to evaluating arts education projects (2004)

Felicity Woolf, Arts Council England

<http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/media/uploads/documents/publications/phpLYO0Ma.pdf>

This guide aims to help everyone involved in arts education projects to understand evaluation clearly and to evaluate effectively, according to their particular needs.

The Friendly Evaluation Toolkit

Nicky Boyd, National Trust

<http://abcofworkingwithschools.files.wordpress.com/2010/08/friendly-evaluation-toolkit-national-trust.pdf>

This is an evaluation toolkit that explores different types of evaluation and offers practical and useful examples of evaluation techniques.

National co-ordinating centre for public engagement

<http://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/how/guides/introduction-evaluation>

This website offers various resources on how to measure the impact of public engagement work including evaluation methods, examples of project evaluations and resources relevant to science, arts and community projects.

Center for the Advancement of Informal Science Education (CAISE)

<http://caise.insci.org/resources>

The resource section of the CAISE website has a set of links to useful reports about evaluating the impact of informal education projects.

InformalScience

<http://informalscience.org/>

This website hosted by the University of Pittsburgh, contains a host of research and evaluation reports and evaluation guidelines about learning science in informal settings.

How to Grow your Social Role

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How to Grow your Social Role

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BGCI

Plants for the Planet

BGCI is the largest international network of botanic gardens and related institutions working collectively for plant conservation and environmental education. Its mission is “to mobilise botanic gardens and engage partners in securing plant diversity for the well-being of people and the planet.”

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The **Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation** supported Communities in Nature under its Environment theme, which aims to help in the development of a society which benefits from a more sustainable relationship with the world and understands the value of its resources.

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For further information, go to www.gulbenkian.org.uk



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